

Provincialising Degrowth and
Situating Buen Vivir: A Decolonial
Framework for the Politics of
Degrowth

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Growth is now a profitable business only if the costs are borne by nature, future generations, consumers' health, wage-earners' working conditions and, above all, the countries of the South. That is why we have to abandon the idea of growth.

Serge Latouche, *Farewell to Growth*

Abstract

This thesis presents an inter-epistemic dialogue between degrowth and *Buen Vivir/sumak kawsay* (BV/sk), a Latin American postdevelopment paradigm. It contributes to nascent, yet rapidly growing debates around decolonising degrowth. As field of study and social movement, degrowth responds to two pressing crises: one, the accelerated destruction of the natural world; two, inequality in resource access, use, and distribution. To live well within socio-ecological limits, degrowth advocates a democratic reduction of material production and consumption in affluent economies. It favours social and political approaches over technical climate change solutions. Policies such as Universal Basic Services or resource tax and dividend programmes would displace economic growth as primary social goal and redistribute resources equitably.

Cultural analyses, however, have been overshadowed by degrowth's socioeconomic models. Allies from the Global South, for instance, criticise its Eurocentrism. In response, this thesis offers cultural and political alternatives to degrowth's anthropocentric aspects. First, it historicises degrowth through the lens of modernity/coloniality. Second, it produces an empirical study of BV/sk in practice, conducted in Ecuador. BV/sk is an Andean-Amazonian conceptualisation of 'Good Living'. Semi-structured interviews with social leaders, community members and politicians generate novel insights into the political economy, political ontology, and gender relations of BV/sk.

The results of the analysis are a decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth. First, the thesis proposes cosmological limits to growth, observed in Ecuador, as normative constraints to economic growth. This relational understanding of limits advances current debates that juxtapose external, physical boundaries with internal, morally constructed limits. Second, BV/sk produces *affective abundance* through reciprocity with non-human communities. The thesis suggests a de-individualised understanding of abundance for degrowth, beyond the provision of universal services. As a cultural and political framework, psychological wellbeing through relational justice re-embeds the natural into the social world, which corrects overly mechanistic ecosystem services perspectives within degrowth.

Key words: degrowth, Buen Vivir, political economy, limits to growth, alternatives to development, modernity/coloniality, decolonisation, abundance, cultural politics, climate change

Declaration of Authorship

I, Katharina Richter, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. A Civilisational Crisis

At the beginning of the 21st Century, our planetary systems are undergoing extraordinary changes. These are manifest not only in rising surface temperatures, but in the chemical composition of the oceans, changes to arctic ice cover, rock sediment and fossil records, as well as a sixth mass extinction of vertebrate and mammal species. The decade between 2011 and 2020 was the warmest since record-keeping began in 1880, while 2016 and 2020 top the list for the hottest years on record (NOAA, 2021). Scientific evidence links this temperature increase to a rise in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from fossil fuel combustion (Pachauri et al., 2014). Historically, this has been shown to be coupled to an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the main indicator of economic growth (Azomahou et al., 2006; Doda, 2013; Raupach et al., 2007). Global aggregate economic output can therefore be said to have pushed humanity past four out of nine planetary boundaries, or safe operating thresholds (Rockström et al., 2009; W. Steffen et al., 2015). This thesis begins from the understanding that the pursuit of economic growth lies at the heart of our ecological crisis.

In addition to the ecological crisis, there's also a socioeconomic crisis. The global political economy is characterised by *unequal ecological exchange*, that is, an asymmetric net flow of biophysical resources from poorer to richer countries (Dorninger et al., 2021; Duro et al., 2018). As such, the current ecological overshoot is almost entirely due to overconsumption in rich countries, who consequently owe ecological debt to the Global South (Srinivasan et al., 2008;

Wiedmann et al., 2015). The EU, for example, accounts for only 7% of the world population, yet uses almost 20% of the planet's biocapacity (WWF and Global Footprint Network, 2019, p. 7). Underlying the ecological crisis therefore is a global inequality crisis of colonial dimensions.

An abundance of knowledge and theoretical disciplines have evolved in response to these crises. These include, amongst others, eco-feminism, eco-centrism, deep ecology, and political ecology. They deliver comprehensive critiques of globalisation, industrial-chemical agriculture, the invisibility of nature and women as reproductive, supportive 'outsiders' to the economy and culture, anthropocentrism, anthropocentric environmentalism, and much more (Guha and Alier, 1997; Mies and Shiva, 2014; Naess, 1995; Plumwood, 2006, p. 55; Salleh, 1984; Shiva, 2015, 2004). Together they form bodies of thought that since the 1960s have been growing steadily in intellectual scope.

In this thesis, however, I focus on degrowth. Degrowth is a growing field within environmental politics and economics. It builds on many of the arguments made by, for instance, eco-feminism and political ecology. Degrowth presents a comprehensive solution to the question of how to live well within planetary boundaries; namely, an equitable, voluntary reduction in material throughput of the economy. Degrowth proponents argue that changes to production and consumption patterns towards care, cooperation and 'conviviality' would not just reduce the economy's material footprint, but also increase wellbeing and democracy (Paulson et al., 2020). What makes degrowth stand out, and is therefore of scholarly interest, is its reliance on biophysical models and

socio-economic arguments to demonstrate that the doctrine of unlimited growth isn't just socially, psychologically and culturally undesirable, but biophysically unfeasible.

Degrowth's ample proposals for institutional, financial, macroeconomic and political changes mostly concern industrialised countries (D'Alessandro et al., 2010; Loehr, 2012; van Griethuysen, 2012; Victor, 2012). Environmental justice groups from the Global South are therefore doubtful of the degrowth movement's ability to overcome the multiple structures of domination prevalent in many postcolonial societies (Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2019). Moreover, degrowth's largely structuralist, anthropocentric discourse on the environment is argued to preclude engagement with ontologically divergent approaches to the living world (Brown, 2018; Demmer and Hummel, 2017; Paulson, 2014, p. 46; Singh, 2019). As such, degrowth has been characterised as Eurocentric (Muradian, 2019; Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019; Varvarousis, 2019). Its scholarship would therefore benefit from more rigorous engagement with decolonial theories and practice. To recalibrate its Eurocentric focus, I therefore connect degrowth with innovative social theory and practice from Latin America.

First, I provide a decolonial and historical perspective for the cultural politics of degrowth through the lens of the modernity/coloniality (MC) discourse. In doing so, I focus on dominant conceptualisations of nature within degrowth. The MC research project aims to contextualise our view of modernity and its categories, including nature, from Latin American historical perspectives. Its thinkers argue that colonialism and the violent appropriation of land, labour and resources, as

well as their subsequent concentration into the hands of a small European minority have enabled modernity's advances in science, technology and rationalism (Lander, 2000a; Mignolo and Escobar, 2010; Quijano, 1992). This critical perspective helps historicise and contextualise degrowth, as well as the growth-based system it wants to overcome.

Second, I conduct a case study of Buen Vivir, a post- development paradigm from Latin America, to provide synergies between degrowth and decolonial practices. Buen Vivir has been enshrined as the right to Good Living in the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution. Though contested by multiple actors, its grassroots interpretation offers an alternative to growth-based development models by fostering cultural, economic and social diversity and emphasising relational, that is, communal interactions between people, nature and communities (Radcliffe, 2012). As such, Buen Vivir as a political project of the Ecuadorian indigenous movements is of inherent interest to degrowth scholars and activists. My aim is to ascertain whether a dialogue with relational epistemologies and ontologies, and indeed other practices of socioecological transformation, may facilitate overcoming degrowth's Eurocentric aspects. I therefore read Buen Vivir from within the parameters of the degrowth literature, and conversely approach degrowth from the theory and practice of Buen Vivir.

Third, the case study offers a novel, and comprehensive, understanding of the political trajectory of Buen Vivir in Ecuador from the 1980s onwards. Additionally, it provides empirical data which clarifies what Buen Vivir as a political, and grassroots decolonial project means in practice. Both contributions directly

address a lack of available historical and empirical data, in English and Spanish respectively. So far, few Spanish-language or Anglophone analyses centre the lives and experiences of the protagonists of Buen Vivir as a political project, that is, the indigenous peoples of Ecuador. This case study is therefore one of the few empirical studies, in either English or Spanish, that explores what Buen Vivir looks like in practice. It also introduces Buen Vivir to a political economy audience in the Western academies, who have not traditionally engaged with the aspects of this alternative to (growth-based) development from Latin America.

The research has three aims. First, I seek to provincialise degrowth (Chakrabarty, 2000). In other words, I aim to contextualise the cultural politics of degrowth through historicising its intellectual foundations and interrogating its ontological assumptions. Second, I aim to situate Buen Vivir by providing an empirical case study. The case study addresses a gap in the literature with regards to how Buen Vivir is constituted in practice. Third, I provide a decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth by bringing it into conversation with Buen Vivir.

Finally, I conceptualise the socioeconomic and ecological crises as *civilisational crisis*. Latin American thinkers who are critical of extraction-led, growth-based development have converged on this notion by Edgardo Lander (2019, p. 15) to denominate the accelerated destruction of the conditions that allow for the creation and reproduction of life. The notion highlights that we aren't just living in times of ecological crisis, but in multiple crises of modernity, defined by the mutually reinforcing civilisational patterns of racism, sexism, classism, anthropocentrism, etc. Lander also argues that the hegemonic knowledge

systems, science and technology, today exacerbate the civilisational crisis, rather than offering solutions to it (2019, p. 14). This is expressed in the preference of green growth, geoengineering, or speculative, large-scale negative emissions technologies over socio-political solutions. The concept of civilisational crisis therefore challenges the analytical categories and knowledge systems of modernity, defined as a specific civilisational model whose socio-cultural and economic structures originate in Renaissance Europe. Examining degrowth through its lens helps locate its Eurocentrism and ultimately, overcome it.

1.2. Research Questions

The research is motivated by two strands of inquiries. First, I am interested in exploring the *benefits and limitations of degrowth as an effective political and economic system*. Notably, this thesis will not engage with a defence of degrowth vis-à-vis neoclassical economic theory, nor other approaches such as ecosocialism. My research starts from the understanding that widening political acceptance of postgrowth economic thinking is becoming increasingly more urgent. In 2021, a deadly heatwave in Western Canada, deemed “virtually impossible” without climate change, prompted global news stories on the accelerated destabilisation of the Earth’s climate system (McGrath, 2021). As such, the first part of this thesis explores the socioecological and political benefits and limitations of degrowth – both in theory and practice.

The second research question focuses on *contributing* to degrowth scholarship. Degrowth supports the establishment of a global equilibrium of steady throughput, without restricting the development of poor countries (D’Alisa et al.,

2014a, p. xxi). I argue that to do so, the debate must consider political ontologies and epistemologies that differ from the mechanistic society/nature dichotomy and its subject/object hierarchy. Consequently, the second enquiry elicits how *the Buen Vivir paradigm can contribute to an ethical and normative, decolonial framework of degrowth*. This inquiry situates degrowth in relation to other responses to the civilisational crisis. Connecting with decolonial struggles is paramount for ensuring that degrowth proposals design transformation strategies with radically different tools and concepts than those that have produced the civilisational crisis in the first place. By 2021, degrowth has certainly become part of a global conversation and is by no means restricted to Europe. The movement does, however, have its geographical and analytical foci in Europe, allowing me to build analytical bridges between Europe, as it were, and Latin America. I therefore conclude by offering a *decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth*.

1.3. Structure

The thesis is divided into the following three parts: Part I Degrowing the Economy; Part II Decentring Europe; Part III Decolonising Degrowth. They consist of three, three, and one chapter(s) respectively. Each chapter is structured around main sections that are split into subsections.

Part I, Degrowing the Economy, is dedicated to exploring degrowth theory, practice, and criticism. In doing so, I open up avenues for intervention, detailed in Part Two. In Chapter Two, I present an orthodox, scientific genealogy of degrowth and its theoretical foundations. This uncovers an early intellectual history of degrowth by outlining the 19th and 20th century strands of thought that have

inspired contemporary degrowth thinking. As such, Chapter Two is a literature review of degrowth's biophysical and political arguments that presents a synthesis of early degrowth thinking, largely based on a nature/culture dichotomy. These arguments range from Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and Ivan Illich to Jacques Ellul, André Gorz, and Serge Latouche. Chapter Two thereby lays the groundwork for subsequent contrasts of this orthodox approach with degrowth's broader "*pluriverse*", as it were, or what Paulson (2021) conceptualises as a "rainbow of knowledges, cosmologies, and vital worlds" that is degrowth practice, scholarship and activism.

Chapter Three discusses degrowth's co-constitutive relationship with activism, and considers the practicalities of a degrowth transition. I operationalise 'degrowth practice' as being formed of political movement(s), policy proposals, and lived experiences. Consequently, I investigate a potential political programme for degrowth and examine the policy proposals that aim to implement such programme. I conclude with reviewing the lived experiences, or 'nowtopias' (Demaria et al., 2019), which arguably put degrowth into practice. In addition to a literature review, Chapter Three therefore presents my own approach to degrowth. It also sets the stage for a dialogue with decolonial practices from Latin America.

In Chapter Four, I recommend three main areas for further degrowth research. These arise from gaps identified in the preceding chapters' literature reviews. I suggest further investigation to provincialise, depatriarchalise and democratise degrowth scholarship. These efforts would enable and promote degrowth allyship

with environmental justice, feminist and other social and political movements.

Overcoming degrowth's Euro- and androcentric foci would increase the movement's scope and validity.

In Part II, De-centring Europe, I implement one aspect of Chapter Four's research recommendation. This Part broadens degrowth scholarship with ideas from the modernity/coloniality discourse, international relations, indigenous and post-development theories, as well as eco-feminism and intellectual history.

Consequently, in Chapter Five, I intervene in recently reignited 'limits to growth' debates. I put forward the notion of 'cosmological limits to growth'. I thereby offer a relational understanding of limits that embeds humans into nature. This notion complements the overly dichotomous juxtaposition, made in the current 'limits' literature, of planetary boundaries with morally constructed, internal limits. In doing so, I mount an ontological critique of degrowth's ecological growth analysis and resulting anthropocentrism using the 'coloniality of nature' approach. In Chapter Five, I therefore suggest alternative, non-Anthropocentric ways of relating with the living world through attributing agency and rights to nature.

Chapter Six and Seven are the empirical chapters. In Chapter Six, I define Buen Vivir, and contextualise my fieldwork within the post pink tide political context of Ecuador. I sketch the political trajectory of Buen Vivir in Ecuador from the 1980s, identify tensions and contradictions within its discourse and knowledge production, and situate my own approach to Buen Vivir. In Chapter Seven, I examine the political economy, gender relations, and political ontology of Buen Vivir. Both chapters are a marked contribution to Buen Vivir scholarship, which so

far has only tentatively engaged with its practice. Chapter Seven converges on the notions of affective abundance and re-existence with regards to its political economy and gender politics respectively. Analysing its political ontology, I illustrate social and cultural practices that delineate cosmological limits to growth in Ecuador.

Part III, Decolonising Degrowth, presents the conclusion of this thesis. In Chapter Eight, I synthesise the arguments of Parts I and II into a decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth. The framework provides a set of conditions and criteria for an equitable dialogue between degrowth and BV with a view to strengthening the viability of both systemic alternatives. In the conclusion, I also emphasise the importance of cultural change beyond socioeconomic processes in designing transitions towards a sustainable future. Chapter Eight thereby represents an inter-epistemic dialogue that contributes to democratising the relationships between different civilisational horizons. It also invites future scholarship to broaden these efforts. The framework doesn't just make visible 'Other' ways of knowing and being, but affords them a prominent place in answering the urgent question of how to live well within planetary boundaries.

1.4. Ecologies of Knowledges

The following paragraphs contextualise both degrowth and Buen Vivir in a little more detail to elucidate the importance of building bridges between the two. 'Degrowth' has been added to the social sciences vernacular as recently as the late 2000s. Yet its origins can be found in the culturalist, political and ecological critiques of economics as a theory and discipline (Latouche, 2009, p. 13; Schneider

et al., 2010). In light of the widening inequalities and accelerating climate change, degrowth proponents insist that the pursuit of economic growth is incompatible with social and environmental sustainability (Martinez-Alier, 2009). Participants of the first international degrowth conference defined it as “a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society” (Research & Degrowth, 2010). Degrowth therefore refers to an equitable, voluntary reduction in material throughput of the economy that would increase democracy and wellbeing through changes to production and consumption patterns. It translates the laws of physics and biology into economic action, while also delivering a critique of the cultural and intellectual foundations of neoclassical economic theory.

Degrowth therefore is first and foremost a critique of the growth imperative built into capitalist (and socialist) economic systems. It aims to decolonise the public debate from “the idiom of economism” by abolishing economic growth as a social objective (Kallis et al., 2014, p. 3). Given the magnitude of multi-level and multi-actor change that would be required for such a transition, degrowth isn’t just a field of study, but also a political and social movement (Demaria et al., 2013). Its participants – academics, activists, artists and practitioners – interact at international conferences, workshops, summer schools, etc. Deliberately shrinking the economy is a contentious and not well-known proposal, even within progressive circles. Yet, in the early 2020s, degrowth is receiving growing coverage, both negative and positive, in the mainstream media (Hickel, 2017a; Oberhofer, 2021; Paul, 2019; Roulet and Bothello, 2020; Seaton, 2020). Given the

growing popularity of degrowth, this thesis is dedicated to contextualising it as political project, interdisciplinary field of study, and social movement.

There are ecological, physical, social and cultural, as well as theoretical reasons that I am interested in degrowth *per se*, rather than its feasibility or desirability. Ecologically, our global ecosystems are on trajectory to no longer being able to support the impacts of 200 years of unmitigated economic growth. Crucially, there is no evidence to suggest that over the long term, *global* economic growth can be decoupled from resource use in absolute terms, while evidence with regards to absolute decoupling from carbon emissions shows that it will remain highly unlikely (Hickel and Kallis, 2019). “Green growth” therefore remains an elusive, yet pernicious environmental myth. In terms of physics, ecological economists apply the laws of thermodynamics to neoclassical economics, noticing the contradiction of basing perpetual economic growth on a finite supply of natural resources (Boulding, 1966; Georgescu-Roegen, 1975; Kerschner, 2010). Economic activity is contingent on the role of ecosystems as both sources and sinks. Consequently, energy and material throughput would have to be reduced to stay within planetary boundaries (Daly, 2007, chaps. 1, 23). Degrowth advocates would argue that eco-modernist, technical solutions to climate change tend to disregard the implications of entropy. Degrowth is therefore partly presented as a more “scientifically sound” solution, a claim that will be investigated – and partly challenged in so far as it reproduces anthropocentric views of the environment – in this thesis.

Socially, the links between economic growth and well-being have been gnawed at since the 1970s (Easterlin, 1974; Easterlin et al., 2010; Fritz and Koch, 2016; Hirsch, 1976; United Nations, 1970, paras. 9, 11). Evidence furthermore suggests that more equal societies tend to have greater well-being, at lesser social cost (Pickett and Wilkinson, 2010). In 2019, New Zealand introduced the 'Wellbeing Budget', which prioritises social, economic, cultural and environmental goals over economic growth (The Treasury, New Zealand, 2019). Degrowth and the question of wellbeing on a planet with finite resources are no longer fringe conversations. As such, they don't have to be defended, but built on. Culturally, degrowth is a radical critique of not just neoclassical economic theory, but industrial society, individualism, consumerism and above all the depiction of humans as *homo economicus*, the archetypically selfish, rational and fully informed decision-maker. The latter in particular has attracted criticisms from a wide range of disciplines (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; Polanyi, 2001; Sahlins, 1972). Degrowth is therefore part of a wider critique of the epistemological hegemony of economics in the humanities and social science (Romano, 2014, p. 21), and merits serious academic attention.

Theoretically, degrowth delivers innovative economic thinking in times of climate crisis. The latter's dire economic consequences have been acknowledged by major international financial and economic institutions (Collins, 2018; World Bank, 2018). Yet, in terms of economic theory, a recent meta-study has found no major theoretical or methodological changes following the 2007/8 financial crisis (Aigner et al., 2018), dampening hopes for climate related innovation. Similarly, much of economic theory fails to account for the complex psychology and culture of

“consumers”. These rarely tend to behave as the models predict – utility-maximising, rational choice-makers (e.g. Sahlins, 1972). There are (neoclassical) economic models that feature boundedly rational agents (Gabaix, 2014; Simon, 1997; Yang et al., 2015). Nevertheless, neoclassical economics’ methodological foundation in individualism, instrumentalism and equilibration continues to inhibit heterodox economic approaches to economics, including non-growth based ones (Arnsperger and Varoufakis, 2006). This thesis is dedicated to degrowth in an effort to break the dominance of neoclassical economics in academia, finance, politics and the overall public imagination.

Buen Vivir in turn is a contested, ambiguous concept, whose indigenous origins and authenticity have been questioned as much as its populist use by socialist governments. Since their ascent, these so-called pink-tide, or progressive governments have increasingly opposed indigenous emancipation and self-determination (Follari, 2013; Gudynas, 2013; Nunez del Prado, 2015, p. 65; Radcliffe, 2012). Following textual evidence, this thesis interprets Buen Vivir, or *sumak kawsay* (in Kichwa) as an indigenous pedagogical principle that translates into ‘life in excellence’, or ‘life in plenitude’, based on harmony with oneself, community and nature (Astudillo, 2020, p. 247; Lechón, 2017). The ‘filling’ of the concept coincided with the strengthening of the indigenous movements in the 1980s and 1990s. This process culminated in the institutionalisation of *sumak kawsay* as Buen Vivir and the right to Good Living in Ecuador’s 2008 constitution. The emptying of the concept coincided with a weakening of the indigenous movements during the Correa governments (2007-2017) and concomitant political oppression of social, indigenous and environmental movements. BV was

appropriated by the Correa administration to sanction extraction-led development. Sumak kawsay in its grassroots sense, however, continues to be a political platform for equality, redistribution of wealth, territory and self-governance for the indigenous movements of Ecuador. From a post-development perspective, it can therefore be understood as an 'alternative to development'.

Buen Vivir and degrowth have the potential to complement each other as *alternatives to growth-based development*, if not by default. Degrowth and Latin American decolonial theories and practices challenge the assumption of unlimited economic growth and development. Degrowth and Buen Vivir both contest the domination of the economic sphere over all other forms of social and biological life (Esteva, 2010, p. 14). In examining these two discourses that share much in common, this thesis follows Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2007) call for diversity in epistemologies, meaning "a plurality of knowledges beyond scientific knowledge". As such, it makes the case for an ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2009, 2007) that brings together diverse ways of knowing in order to transcend their respective limits and confront the civilisational crisis at its intersections. One of the conditions for an equitable dialogue between the two is abandoning the idea that one type of knowledge – scientific, peer-reviewed – is able to tackle these multiple crises. Degrowth and BV articulate different epistemologies, yet both argue for abandoning the privileging of economic epistemologies over others. Yet, there are differences between these discourses that I hope to be synergistic.

Degrowth delivers a concrete, substantiated, and compelling attack on the driver of ecological collapse – the pursuit of economic growth measured in GDP.

Degrowth proponents comprehensively critique growth-based capitalism, while putting forward very practical proposals on how to implement an alternative to it. In its detailed analysis of biological processes and the effects of economic activity on them, degrowth has the potential to complement Buen Vivir's less systematic political economy approach. However, the critique of 'development' contained within BV goes beyond political economy and *homo economicus*. It includes systems of knowledge, gender, race and the natural environment. These systems are considered to be the result of 'coloniality', that is, the logic of structural domination (Escobar, 2010; Quijano, 2010). Degrowth's main weakness then – its Eurocentric focus and ahistorical approach to growth-based capitalism – could be overcome if its discourse was built on a more comprehensive analysis of colonialism and resulting issues, such as ecological debt and environmental justice. Finally, the practitioners of BV theorise and enact an alternative to growth-based capitalism, ostensibly beyond mechanistic, anthropocentric dichotomies that confine nature to the realm of resources. The theoretical analysis of (de-)coloniality by the MC discourse and the practical application of decolonial thinking via BV should be considerable points of interest for degrowth (see Cubillo Guevara and Hidalgo Capitán, 2015, p. 144 for a direct comparison between degrowth and BV). The most important conclusion is that neither degrowth nor BV are *the* solution to the civilisational crisis. Instead, they are an example of the *ecology of knowledges* required to address the intersecting problems of this crisis in an equitable manner. Moreover, degrowth itself has long been viewed with

interests by Latin American scholars (Acosta, 2017; Altvater, 2011; Barranquero, 2013; Barrantes-Montero, 2014; Escobar, 2015; Falconí and Vallejo, 2012; Gudynas, 2017; Kothari et al., 2014; López, 2017). Degrowth proponents in turn have only just begun to engage with the Global South and environmental justice (Dengler and Seebacher, 2019). This thesis does so in detail.

1.5. Methodology and Methods

A large part of this thesis consists of desk-based research, examining the intellectual foundations and practical applications of degrowth, as well as approaching degrowth from Latin American social theories and decolonial practice. The empirical element consists of a qualitative Buen Vivir case study, conducted in Ecuador from January to March 2020. I conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 15 social and political leaders and community members. Furthermore, I observed municipal and indigenous assemblies, carnival celebrations and NGO meetings. Chapter Six gives a more detailed overview of the fieldwork background.

In terms of methodology, these interviews and participant observations have provided rich data for an analysis of the political economy, gender relations, and political ontology of Buen Vivir (Creswell, 1994; Farooq Joubish et al., 2011; Stainback and Stainback, 1988). The interviews and observations yielded in-depth, discursive results and an accompanying, holistic understanding of BV in practice (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Magoon, 1977). This understanding also informed the conclusion's decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth. This qualitative research is not just implicitly, but explicitly political, based on an a priori

preference of environmental justice and wellbeing over economic growth or development-as-growth (Law and Urry, 2004). This normative outlook shapes the interview questions and outcomes, seeking to account for complex identities and experiences of the interviewees (Byrne, 1998; Sandelowski, 2004, p. 893). Furthermore, this project is rooted in the interpretivist tradition. As such, it endeavours to understand the complexity of BV as an indigenous social construct, political project and ideology, interpreting its meaning in an intersubjective world (Burr, 2003; Hammersley and Campbell, 2012). Latin American scholars have argued that the subject/object dichotomy that produces the effect of an outside reality is a specific historical product of European culture from the Renaissance onwards, which subsequently, via the colonial process, has been exported and imposed onto the cultures of the rest of the world (Quijano, 2010). In the absence of objectivity in knowledge production, this research moves beyond empiricism and positivism, not seeking to “know in order to predict and to predict in order to control” (Comte, cited in Baert, 2005, p. 110). The knowledge it generates is necessarily co-produced by interviewees and interviewer, albeit under asymmetric relations of power.

Indigenous peoples and research have been historically linked to imperialism, colonialism and the appropriation of indigenous knowledge (Smith, 2012). The questions will be framed by a critical reflection on the underlying theories of interviews in a context of power imbalance towards the Other (ibid). As such, this thesis tries to avoid the “colonialist move”, that is, the “production of discourse under conditions of unequal power” (Escobar, 1995, p. 9) that homogenises, essentialises and ultimately allows the exercise of power over the interviewees

(ibid; Mohanty, 1988). “Extracting” knowledge from the interviewees for the sake of advancing progressive politics in the global North defeats the emancipatory politics of this research.

This thesis engages with indigenous scholarship prior to, during and after the field work. I interviewed indigenous activists and academics as well as their allies who are involved in the construction of Buen Vivir, not as a constitutional mandate that has been co-opted by the state, but as an every-day, decolonial grassroots practice that is in constant contestation and transformation.

Due to the situated and contingent nature of any of such interview questions, there will be tensions between my own cognitive-political spatial temporality (that of scientific-empiric, libertarian-emancipatory enquiry that itself is grounded in European philosophy and political thought) and that of the interviewee (Scott, 2004, in Suša, 2016), regardless of whether the intended outcome is to challenge and transcend ways of thinking that are based on a dichotomous separation between knowing and being in the first place.

Lastly, recent BV scholarship can be seen as part of the so-called Ontological Turn that challenges the nature/culture divide in the social sciences and humanities (OT; Todd, 2016). The investigation of divergent, plural ontologies might produce the types of decolonial thinking advocated by indigenous scholars (Cameron et al., 2014). Yet, this “turn toward Indigenous ontologies [may] retrench, rather than redress, colonial forms of knowledge production” (ibid) when non-indigenous researchers undermine their decolonising potential by upholding academic standards of knowledge production and dissemination (Hunt, 2014). Furthermore,

the OT risks appropriating indigenous knowledge without indigenous interlocutors (Todd, 2016; Watts, 2013). For example, even though considered ground-breaking in certain sociological and political theory circles, Latour's various challenges to the nature/culture divide (2014, 2013, 2004, 1993) have been criticised for failing to reference for example Inuit, Anishinaabe, or Nehiyawak cosmologies:

[we are] celebrating and worshipping a European thinker for 'discovering', or newly articulating by drawing on a European intellectual heritage, what many an Indigenous thinker around the world could have told you for millennia: the climate is a common organizing force! (Todd, 2016).

This research therefore accounts for indigenous thinking, including indigenous place-thought, and considers the ongoing coloniality of the academy (Sundberg, 2014; Todd, 2016; Watts, 2013). The preceding subsection has already laid out the conditions for an equitable dialogue between degrowth and Buen Vivir. Part II dives into these questions in detail.

Following Saïd, this research therefore aims to break with the "positional superiority" (Saïd, 2003, p. 7) of Western knowledge and culture, implemented by adopting an "active interviewing" approach (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). As such, the interview is perceived to be an act of collaboration between interviewee and researcher, whose interaction co-produce the data (Hammersley and Campbell, 2012). Yet, the cross-language nature of the research raises issues of representation, power and subjectivity (Temple and Young, 2004). Methodological rigour and overall trustworthiness are met by acknowledging and documenting the translation process and using 'conceptual equivalence' rather than literal translations (Edwards, 1998; Squires, 2009). The hermeneutic analysis of the data rests on the Habermasian notion of "mutual understanding" a way of

communicating between different worlds (Thompson, 1981, p. 81). My own ontological and epistemological assumptions may interfere with this endeavour, despite the research's onus on mutual understanding, co-production of knowledge and co-learning. My research aims to, if not reverse, the historical superiority of the West, then to provide a space in which the interviewees represent themselves. This process is tenuous and contingent, and the discussion will reflect whether this research has sparked a non-hierarchical knowledge production.

Part I – Degrowing the Economy

Chapter 2: Degrowth in Genesis

This chapter presents an early intellectual history of the *scientifique* strand of degrowth, almost exclusively produced by male thinkers in the European academies. It's an *early* history because it weaves together those 19th and 20th century scientific, economic, political and cultural debates that have inspired contemporary, 21st century degrowth. The latter is more intellectually diverse, and draws on a broader range of genealogical roots, which will be presented and discussed throughout the remainder of the thesis. Though loosely presented in chronological order, this chapter's thinkers come from different political traditions and scientific backgrounds. Their writings in and of themselves don't add up to a coherent discursive field of early degrowth, nor do they necessarily build on each other. Instead, in tracing the intellectual sources of its core tenets, the present genealogy reflects the intellectual origins of degrowth scholarship. It places equal weight on its scientific – that is biophysical – arguments, as well as degrowth's origins in the sociocultural and political critiques of industrial society and *homo economicus*. The genealogy offered in this chapter does not represent an "official" history of degrowth, much less a schematic attempt to unify diverse strands of intellectual traditions. It does, however, present a narrow early intellectual history of degrowth, plucked from the much more heterogenous realm of degrowth for the following reasons.

The first aim of this chapter is to contextualise how degrowth stands out intellectually and politically through an analysis of neoclassical and Marxist approaches to the environment. In demonstrating how both approaches side-line

ecological concerns, this chapter paves the way for the subsequent degrowth genealogy, whose thinkers put those at the heart of their analysis. Second, it demonstrates that the early scientific and philosophical foundations of degrowth are both rigorous and intellectually diverse, yet, and despite their eco-centric analyses, are also based on nature/culture and subject/object dichotomies that subsequent chapters will untangle. Third, this chapter provides a complementary, historical angle to contemporary histories of degrowth by – albeit briefly – analysing colonial processes that enabled the industrial revolutions.¹

The genealogy starts with 19th century scientific innovations, specifically thermodynamics. Thermodynamics forms the basis of the *physical* case for degrowth. Georgescu-Roegen makes the biophysical case for degrowth in the mid-20th century based on thermodynamics and ecological economics. They are explored in detail, given that degrowth derives its ecological growth analysis from ecological economics. In speaking the language of ecological economics, as it were, degrowth intervenes in economic theory using econometric models.

Grasping the scientific arguments and rationale behind these models is pivotal for a substantive engagement with degrowth itself. Furthermore, since this thesis aims to engage with broader degrowth scholarship, activism and practice beyond its economistic analyses, it makes sense to start with an exploration of the arguments behind that economistic approach.

¹ For complementary degrowth genealogies, see Kallis (2018, chap. 1), Liegey and Nelson (2020, pp. 1–11, chap. 2) and D’Alisa et al. (2014a). Hickel (2020, chap. 2) considers colonialism a capitalist fix to crises of elite accumulation. He therefore sees colonialism as pertinent to the origins of an economic system based on excess, compound and infinite growth.

The biological arguments that degrowth rests on are reflected in environmental movements and the limits to growth debates of the 1970s. Two women in particular have catalysed and contributed to these debates: Donella Meadows and Rachel Carson. The social and cultural critiques of industrial society that have inspired degrowth thinkers is explored in the writings of Ivan Illich and Jacques Ellul. Illich's writings in particular culminate in the idea of the 'convivial society', which strongly animates contemporary degrowth scholarship. Political arguments for degrowth are drawn from André Gorz and Cornelius Castoriadis. Both have inspired Serge Latouche and his 2009 foundational tract *Farewell to Growth*, amongst many others (Muraca, 2013). To reiterate, these thinkers come from different political traditions and scientific fields, and should not be considered as part of a cohesive discourse. They share, however, similar critiques towards the domination of the economy over social and ecological spheres. They also provide biophysical arguments for the incompatibility of perpetual economic growth with the safe thresholds of planetary boundaries. In doing so, they insist that degrowth alone, and certainly when compared to neoclassical and/or materialist economic approaches, takes seriously the physical, that is, objective and scientific, foundations of the economy.

The genealogy ends with Latouche's *Farewell to Growth*, which has arguably catapulted nascent French degrowth debates in the early 2000s into broader, Anglophone scholarship. *Farewell to Growth* is widely referenced in degrowth writings. It is arguably the first text that combines biological, sociocultural, and political arguments for degrowth. Ten years lie between its publication and the next round of substantial degrowth book publications. The intervening years were

characterised by increasing scholarly attention to degrowth, as well as strengthening and dissemination of its arguments in practice, as well as intervention by feminists and thinkers from the Global South. These will be the subject of the third and fourth chapters.

2.1. The Entropy Law, Colonialism and Economic Theory

2.1.1. Science and the beginning of a colonial global economy

This main part's first subsection is based on, and advances, critical approaches to political economy, which consider colonialism as constitutive of capitalism.

Bhambra's (2020) understanding of a 'colonial global economy' stipulates that capitalist development has been enabled by colonial processes of appropriation, possession, enslavement, and extraction. Contrary to liberal and Marxist political economy narratives, which posit the origins of the global economic order in market expansion and changing social relations, Bhambra argues that it was the colonial relations which underpin these two processes that enabled the development of the global economic order itself. I propose taking this a step further, and suggest that the scientific discoveries that were made because of industrial development were also embedded in this colonial global economy. Colonialism hasn't just enabled the developments of capitalism and modern welfare states, as Bhambra and Holmwood argue (2018), but so too has it facilitated technological developments that resulted in the modern understanding of energy and entropy. Tied to these technological developments are anthropocentric subjectivities shaped by the economic system of capitalism, and the colonial processes it has been embedded in. To illustrate my argument with

regards to energy and entropy with an example, I will use the steam engine and the Industrial Revolution.

The steam engine, patented by James Watt in 1769, is symbol of the Industrial Revolution's technological advances in Western Europe. The Industrial Revolution marked the beginning of a global capitalist system. Its rapid progress was financed by merchants and financiers whose wealth stemmed from the slave trade and economic exploitation of the British empire (Williams, 1944, p. 105). Watt's steam engine itself was financed by capital accumulated from trade in the West Indies (ibid, p. 102). Through taxation, appropriation of India's gold and foreign exchange earnings and enforced borrowing, the East India Company and later British Crown extracted up to £9.2 trillion in today's money from India between 1765 and 1938 (Patnaik, 2019, p. 311). This amounts to over four times the UK's pre-pandemic GDP of £2.2 trillion in 2019. During the entire period of the first IR, re-exports of essentially free raw materials from Asia, the West Indies, and Ireland, enabled Britain to purchase bar-iron, tar, and timber from Europe (Deane, 1965, in Patnaik, 2019, p. 283; Patnaik and Patnaik, 2016, p. 177). These strategic products helped fuel the technological efficiency gains that tripled Britain's cotton and heavy industries output throughout the 18th century (Williams, 1944, p. 106). The case of the steam engine alone suggests that state-managed colonialism catalysed and diffused capitalism and enabled the Industrial Revolution with its associated scientific discoveries. It achieved this, above all, within the field of thermodynamics.²

² For an account of thermodynamics as an imperial science, see Daggett (2019).

In the first half of the 19th century, following two hundred years of colonial expansion and the development of the transatlantic slave trade, scientists in Europe wanted to improve the efficiency of heat (i.e. steam) engines. The scientific understanding of energy had changed drastically during this time. Important contributors to the field of physics, chemistry and thermodynamics include J.R. Mayer, James P. Joule, L.A. Colding, and H. von Helmholtz, who introduced hypotheses regarding energy conservation. They were succeeded by Sadi Carnot, William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), Rudolf Clausius, Michael Faraday, and Justus von Liebig, amongst others (Foster and Burkett, 2004). With Carnot's work on the efficiency of heat engines and the subsequent formulation of the second law of thermodynamics in 1824, energy came to be associated with entropy before the first law of thermodynamics had even been discovered.

The first two laws of thermodynamics are as follows. The first law of thermodynamics holds that both matter and energy are constant. They can neither be produced nor consumed; instead, they can only be transformed (Daly, 2007, p. 68). The second law of thermodynamics states that the transformation of matter and energy heralds their dissipation, and therefore their *availability*. The second law of thermodynamics irrevocably reduces our "*capacity to rearrange matter/energy*" (Ibid, emphasis in original). Carnot's work on heat engine efficiency and discovery of the second law of thermodynamics is a remarkable example of technological developments impacting on the theoretical understanding of physics, or more precisely, the branch of mathematical physics.

The scientists working on the steam engine's perfection were part of the Industrial Revolution. Through their investors, they were linked to a violent colonial process that, in the eyes of the imperial powers, placed Europe at the centre of a world whose periphery came to serve their material interests. Carnot's father, the mathematician Lazare Carnot, was one of Napoleon's most successful generals, while Sadi himself remained a life-long army officer in post-Napoleonic France (Carnot, 2012, p. ix). This period in which science and the search for efficiency became inextricably linked with conquest and discovery came to be understood as modernity. Latin American scholars argue that the term ought not to be understood in the strict Hegelian sense as a European product of the Reformation, Enlightenment and French Revolution, events that are understood in this framework to have catapulted Europe both at the start and the end of world history. Instead Latin American scholars see it as a *dialectic* development between Europe and the rest of the world (Dussel, 1993). As such, modernity stands for rationalism and emancipation in Europe, as much as it stands for conquest, enslavement and genocide unleashed by Europeans onto the peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas.

This Amerindian/Latin American postcolonial critique of the Hegelian understanding of modernity theorises the period of coloniality as the "darker side", or "myth", of Western modernity (Dussel, 1993; Mignolo, 2011a). With the rise of scientific reasoning, technical progress came to be seen as a linear development, and investment as the means to increase productive capacity (Alier and Naredo, 1982). The engineers' definition of energy as a stockpile arose from their anthropocentric perspective, rooted in Euro-Christian cosmology and

industrial technological development (Myers, 2017). As such, they came to classify energy according to its usefulness for humans, into *available* or *free* energy, and *unavailable* or *bound* energy, which can and cannot be transformed into work respectively (Georgescu-Roegen, 1975). Entropy is an indicator of the amount of unavailable energy in a closed thermodynamic system at a given moment in time (ibid). It lies at the core of degrowth's biophysical arguments (see D'Alisa et al., 2014a, pt. II), and to understand entropy more fully, it is necessary to explore the concept in some more detail.

Over the course of the 19th century, these physicists recognised the limits of mechanics in explaining certain phenomena, and so formulated a new branch of physics - thermodynamics. In 1854, Rudolf Clausius, elaborating on Carnot's earlier work on heat efficiency, articulated the following new theorem: "Heat cannot, of itself, pass from a colder body to a hotter body" (Clausius, 1879, p. 78). In other words, heat moves in a one-directional manner, from the hotter to the colder body (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 3). The revolutionary finding was that after use, energy dissipates and increases entropy, or the amount of unavailable energy. The entropic process, therefore, represents an *irreversible, qualitative* change.

From this observation followed the second law of thermodynamics, shown to be correctly formulated by both Kelvin and Clausius (Rao, 2004, p. 213). To reiterate, in a closed system, entropy (or the amount of bound, unavailable energy *and* matter) continuously and irreversibly increases towards a maximum, until eventually there is neither energy nor matter available for human use (Georgescu-Roegen, 1975). Such an imposition of final, cosmic disorder along a

“thermodynamic arrow of time” naturally does not apply to earth in its entirety, as our planet is an open thermodynamic system with regards to the sun (Wicken, 1978 in Egel, 2012, emphasis in original). Yet, I would argue that the economic process ought to be informed by the teachings of this law. It indicates the *general direction* of change, if not its specific timeframe. The Entropy Law may “teach to anyone willing to listen what *aims* are better for the economy of [humankind]” (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 18, my emphasis).

The first law of thermodynamics, the law of conservation of matter and energy, precludes the creation of energy or new materials out of nothing. It posits that neither energy nor matter can be created or destroyed – the amount of both in the universe is constant (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 5). This means that rather than using up energy or raw materials, human interaction irrevocably moves, controls, stores or dissipates energy and matter, ultimately diminishing their quality, or usefulness (second law of thermodynamics, “Entropy Law”; Daly, 2007, p. 215). Depleting finite resources and polluting finite sinks not only decrease the usefulness of matter and energy to humankind, but inevitably exclude these resources and sinks from future use (Ibid). Both thermodynamic laws have a profound impact on how we ought to manage our ecological systems and the economies that rely on them.

At the time, the Entropy Law ended “the supremacy of the mechanistic epistemology in physics” and therefore ought to be regarded as the physics of economic value, or scarcity (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 3). Without degradation of free into bound energy (and matter), there would be no scarcity, as a piece of

coal could be used endlessly (Ibid, p. 6). Taking this concept one step further, degrowth *scientifique* therefore proposes that the second law of thermodynamics delineates the physical limits to economic growth. It is worth pointing out that historically, this growth-restraining interpretation of the second law of thermodynamics is a niche interpretation of the matter. New Daggett (2019, pp. 53–56) puts forward an arguably much more dominant interpretation of this law. The *geo-theology of energy* posits that William Thomson, mentioned earlier as one of the engineers working on the new energy science, and other Scottish Presbyterians took the degradation of free into bound energy and matter “as a scientific validation of the Protestant ethic of maximizing work and minimizing waste” (Ibid, p. 54). As such, there are multiple, co-existing, and cosmologically contingent explanations of the Entropy Law. Degrowth *scientifique* is built on the growth-restraining, rather than growth-stimulating variant. Nevertheless, it thereby also reveals itself as a project that is grounded in the natural sciences of 19th and 20th century Europe, predicated on the artificial separation of the natural from the human world. Parts II and III will explore these critiques in more depth and offer alternatives.

To reiterate, Georgescu-Roegen, ecological economics, and later, degrowth *scientifique*, argue that the Entropy Law’s ultimate consequence for the economic process is that economic growth based on low entropy input (natural resources), and high entropy output (waste), is unviable over time because the earth is a closed system, except with regards to solar energy. Arguments for decoupling resource use from economic growth have so far not proven viable, but continue to be made (Blomqvist, 2018; Hickel and Kallis, 2019). Consequently, the discipline of

economics has largely failed to translate the second law of thermodynamics, dating back to the middle of the 19th century, into their analyses. Rather than just ignoring these physical laws, economists have often been outright flouting them. Robert M. Solow, author of the widely influential neoclassical economic growth model, insists that while

everything is subject to the entropy law, [...] this is of no immediate practical importance for modeling what is, after all, a brief instant of time in a small corner of the universe (1997, p. 268).

Twenty years later, the rapidly accelerating destabilisation of the planet's biodiversity systems, geochemical flows and atmosphere seriously threatens organised human life on earth (W. Steffen et al., 2015). Solow made this statement more than a hundred years after a man called Sergei Podolinsky first attempted to alert economists to the epistemological flaws of their field. The next subsection uncovers how Podolinsky attempted to persuade Marx to include the physical implications of the entropic process in his labour theory of value. It shows that, similar to neoclassical economics, Marxist ecological analysis does not challenge the logics of growth and productivism. The chapter then shows how, contrary to neoclassical and Marxist economics, the early intellectual precursors to degrowth challenge those logics.

2.1.2. Historical Materialism and the Environment

In the early 1980s, Alier and Naredo translated the work of Sergei Podolinsky, an exiled 19th century Ukrainian physician and socialist. The authors (1982) argue that one hundred years earlier, in the 1880s, Podolinsky tried to convince his contemporaries Marx and Engels to consider the economy's material basis, rather than exclusively analyse relations of production and the labour theory of value.

Being aware of the second law of thermodynamics, Podolinsky thought that since the energy that fuels human life comes from nature rather than labour, the latter could not create value by itself (Alier and Naredo, 1982). He further argued that by confining the input of natural resources to their mere production value, economic theory ignores both its inherent ecological components as well as the laws of physics. Such economic analyses could not acknowledge the finite character of natural resources. Using modern-day energy accounting methods, Podolinsky showed that labour may increase the energy supply through, say, farming. In other words, energy productivity is increased through human work (Ibid). He thereby demonstrated how a labour theory of value could be compatible with an energy theory of value and correctly “put forward [...] the basic proposition that human life depends on how the flow of solar energy is used” (Alier and Naredo, 1982).

Alier and Naredo (1982) follow the course of this debate, noting that Engels denied the usefulness of energy analysis for industrial economies in his comments to Marx about Podolinsky’s ideas: “the wish to express economic relations in physical measures is quite impossible”. Instead, Engels argued that increased mechanisation would increase the world’s energy supply. However, Burkett and Foster (2008) claim that the authors restricted their analysis to the German translation of Podolinsky’s article, published in *Die Neue Zeit* in 1883. Engels had in fact commented on an Italian version previously published in *La Plebe* in 1881. Foster and Burkett’s translation of the German version shows that while all the passages that Engels commented on were carried over into the German version, significant differences between the two remain. The Italian version did not mention renewable and inorganic energy sources, they claim. Moreover, Foster

and Burkett contend that the German version fails to consider the “squandering of coal which worried Engels”, nor that it considers the role of coal in accounting for labour energy-productivity. Burkett and Foster thus consider Podolinsky’s analysis neither path-breaking nor accurate: “basically a shallow, energy-reductionist recasting of some established results from Marxist political economy and historiography” (2008, p. 132). To them, Podolinsky’s energy reductionism and closed-system thinking fares less well in comparison to Marx’ and Engels’ metabolic open-system perspective on human production, capitalism and the environment (Ibid). In particular reference to some of Podolinsky’s more obscure arguments vis-à-vis the representation of human labour as “an example of what Sadi-Carnot called a *perfect machine*” (Podolinsky, 2004), Marx and Engels maintained that Podolinsky “[confused] the physical with the economic” (1975b, p. 412, cited in Burkett and Foster, 2008). While it is true that Podolinsky did not extend his energy accounts to industrial activities (Martinez-Alier and Schlüpmann, 1987, p. 22), he nevertheless correctly acknowledged the role of energy in the production process, not just that of soil nutrients. Podolinsky was ostensibly one of the first to challenge Marx’s theory of value from a natural science point of view.

The controversy surrounding “the Podolinsky business”, or “myth”, is exemplary of a larger debate about the relationship between historical materialism and ecology. Following Foster (1999), these views range from those that consider Marx anti-ecological to “promethean”, that is, a belief that post-capitalist society’s abundance would eliminate environmental problems. Other approaches are divided along social and ecological lines or consider Marx’s analysis as

systematically ecological (Ibid). Foster himself (1999) contends that Marx considered “the co-evolution of nature and human society” though the concept of the ‘metabolic rift’. The latter describes capitalist society’s estrangement “from the natural conditions of [...] existence” (Ibid). Yet, this metabolic human-nature relationship regarded the environment in terms of anthropocentric domination, to be brought “under collective control” (Marx, 1981, p. 959). For Bookchin (2005, p. 29), Marx’s economistic idea of class, especially the control and use of surplus labour, is strongly rooted in his perception of nature as the “realm of necessity”, tameable and made useful only by human labour. Marxist analysis, Bookchin (Ibid) argues, regards the domination of nature through the exploitation of labour as the first step towards “bringing (...) nature into the service of humanity”, the achievement of which would erase class-based existence.

While it would indeed be naïve to accuse the great thinker of failing to address ecological issues in his work – both his earliest and later writings focus on resource sustainability, especially soil degradation and deforestation (Marx and Engels, 1975, p. 559) – Marx’s historical materialism fails to consider natural resources as restraints on production *per se*, as surplus value can only ever be derived from labour (Redclift, 2010). Physics and economics remain separate, a problem that’s compounded by what Bookchin perceives as an overtly simplistic economistic basis of Marx’s “overwhelming preoccupation with the labour process” and its product, the exchange commodity (2005, p. 29). Historical Materialism consequently perpetuates the strict separation of natural and social sciences, the

result of which is a *Lebenswelt* void of a holistic understanding about our complex interaction with the natural world.

This dialectic between nature and humanity has echoes in debates about socialism and ecology today. Indeed, the growing field of ecosocialism is dedicated to systematically engaging socialist theory with the physical and natural sciences (Schwartzman, 2009). The different strands of ecosocialism are sympathetic to, but often critical of degrowth (Löwy, 2020; Schwartzman, 2012). Ecosocialists tend to apply a Marxist understanding of capitalism, which determines available possibilities for socioeconomic change to the climate and ecological crises (Wall, 2018, p. 114). This has particularly been the case in the US, where the first congressional resolution of the Green New Deal in 2018, as well as the multitude of policy proposals it inspired, have made ecosocialism palatable to wider activist, academic and policy circles (Cohen and Riofrancos, 2020; Klein, 2018; Schwartzman, 2011). Ecosocialism has since then become a leading theme in progressive climate action in the US, albeit to varying extents and degrees of engagement with socialist theory and practice. Since this thesis is dedicated to establishing a dialogue between socioecological transformation movements in Europe and Latin America, a discussion that reflects ecosocialism's increasing prominence would be beyond the scope of this chapter.

This subsection has argued that Marxist narratives of ecology fail to account for entropic processes and the complexities of human life in relation to non-human nature. Moreover, Marxism forms part of the European traditions that have so far failed to address how unequal power relations would be changed *outside*

industrialised peoples and societies, for the benefit of those who do not want to identify as the proletariat or industrial workers. Oglala Lakota activist Russell Means points out that Marxism presents no challenge to industrialism and its harmful socio-ecological effects, but indeed wants to struggle for its continuation, albeit with different redistribution mechanisms that will continue to exploit nature and those outside the system (1983, p. 26; see also Berman, 1988, chap. 3).

Marx's abstraction of the labour process dehumanises and despiritualises both the person and the environment. The Marxist post-revolution labour, rather than need-based distribution of resources and goods, was also a point of critique for socialists and communitarian libertarians like Morris (1887) and Kropotkin (1920).

Means argues that a Marxist *revolution*, therefore, "really means a *continuation*" of European industrialism based on rationality, resource exploitation and progress (1983, p. 26). Marxism thereby forms part of a body of modern economic theory and political philosophy that is based on a dichotomous epistemology perceiving not only mind and body, but also human and nature as separate entities (Bookchin, 2005, p. 104). Dunlap and Martin have argued that the economic and technological successes of the Industrial Revolution contributed to a socio-cultural determinism that sees successful human development independent of the natural environment (1983, p. 202 in Foster, 1999). The nature and culture dualism has shaped not only Marxist economic theory, but ecological economics (Kolinjivadi, 2019), and by extension, degrowth. Part II of this thesis draws out some of the latter's ontological assumptions in more detail.

2.1.3. Natural Capital and the Production Function

The previous subsection has demonstrated why Marxism only provides a partial response to the problem of the Entropy Law. It has also shown Marxist embeddedness in the logics of productivism and growth, as well as Eurocentric forms of knowledge production with regards to the environment. In illustrating a brief history of natural capital, this subsection goes on to show how classical, neoclassical, and ecological economics have incorporated the environment in their analyses. This precedes an analysis of a more comprehensive ecological critique of growth that has inspired degrowth, delivered by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen.

During the 18th and 19th century, classical economics summed up natural resources under the umbrella term land and treated this factor of production as freely and infinitely available. This changed in the 20th century (Farley, 2012; Hubacek and van den Bergh, 2006). Capital, for its part, had been redefined to include any asset that provides a stream of income, and was therefore considered to include land (Fisher, 2006). The standard (classical) production function consequently displays the rate of commodity output as a function of labour and capital only (Daly, 2007, p. 43; Robinson, 1953). In the Cobb-Douglas production function, natural resources are included as land, but may approach zero despite output remaining constant, since labour and capital increases are understood to compensate for the disappearance of natural resources (Daly et al., 1994, p. 112). As such, the market mechanism is presumed to stipulate technological innovation that creates substitutes for all dwindling resources (Farley and Daly, 2006). Indeed, neoclassical economist R. M. Solow proclaimed that “the world can, in effect, get along without natural resources” (1974). Scientific research has since refuted this

statement resoundingly (Hickel and Kallis, 2019; Rockström et al., 2009; W. Steffen et al., 2015).

The first explicit reference to natural capital can be found in *Small is Beautiful*, a socio-ecological manifesto published in 1973. In it, E. F. Schumacher advocated the downscaling of production and consumption (Farley, 2012). He argued that if natural resources were treated as capital, rather than income, their use in the production process would be carefully minimised, rather than misspent as he deemed them to have been since the end of World War II: “If we squander our fossil fuels, we threaten civilisation; but if we squander the capital represented by living nature around us, we threaten life itself” (1973, p. 17). Based on this proposition, ecological economists have been arguing for the inclusion of natural capital as a limiting factor in economic production, and for its incorporation as a factor of production.

Ecological economics regards the ability of ecosystems to regenerate themselves, as well as to absorb and recycle waste as natural capital’s most important function: all economic activity produces waste which in turn may degrade natural capital (Daly, 1978, 1974; Farley and Daly, 2006). To measure and make visible the economic value of said degradation, and to inform policy, ecological economists have devised valuation methods that attribute a monetary value to natural capital (Costanza et al., 1997). Alongside its ontological assumptions, analysed in Chapter Five, this raises questions around equity and environmental justice (Kallis et al., 2013). However, the inclusion of natural capital in economic analyses has gained traction beyond the discipline of ecological economics. By 2020, natural capital

has entered policy-making circles as stocks of biodiversity and flows of ecosystem and abiotic services that together provide benefits to business and society (Natural Capital Coalition, 2016, p. 12). Its protection, valuation and investment has become a main policy goal at the supranational level (UNEP, 2019, pp. 1–2). As such, there are signs that natural capital is no longer a mere sub-topic of ecological economics, but has entered mainstream policy debates.

In sum, natural goods and the services they provide are essential, non-substitutable factors of production and since the 1990s have been recognised as such within ecological economics. The debate around natural capital, and some of its modern market-based conservation applications – such as Payments for Ecosystem Services – is far from settled. Herman E. Daly and Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen were the key thinkers who since the 1970s have been alerting economists to natural capital's implication for the economic process. Their conclusions differed, however (see '2.2.2. Degrowth versus Steady State').

This and the preceding subsection have analysed the different limitations that Historical Materialism and neoclassical economics contain in their analytical approach to the environment. The following main section sketches the origins of degrowth literature in the biophysical critique of neoclassical economics. As such, the proceeding section builds on the arguments presented so far, but is the first part of the genealogy of degrowth *scientifique*. It is followed by three more main sections that analyse sociocultural and political critiques of growth. From the next main section onwards, Chapter Two therefore constructs an early intellectual history of the *scientifique* strand of degrowth, characterised by econometric

analyses, biophysical models, and critiques of industrialisation. This early history begins with Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen.

2.2. The ecological critique of growth

The contributions of the Romanian-born economist, statistician and mathematician to the field of economics have been nothing short of revolutionary, yet are not incorporated into standard economic theory (Daly, 1995). While the history of ecological economics has been described elsewhere (Costanza, 1989; Costanza and Daly, 1987; Martinez-Alier and Schlüpmann, 1987; Mayumi, 2001), the aim of this tract is to present the central tenets of bioeconomics, on which the ecological degrowth arguments rest. First and foremost, it is a radical critique of classical and neoclassical economics, as well as Marxist analysis, all three of which have developed in conjunction with and opposition to, modern capitalism.

Georgescu-Roegen's critique of conventional economics was chiefly concerned with what he perceived as mechanistic reductionism. The mechanistic conception of economics went beyond the theorisation of consumer behaviour however, its pinnacle being the "isolated, self-contained and ahistorical" (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 2) circular flow between production and consumption. Mechanistic reductionism was chiefly embodied in the "fiction of the *homo economicus*", said to "[strip] man's behaviour of every cultural propensity, which is tantamount to saying that in his economic life man acts mechanically" (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 1). Thinkers from the humanities and social science have also denounced the concept as overly reductive. Critics include Karl Polanyi and Marshall Sahlins from the fields of political economy and anthropology, Emile Durkheim and Marcel

Mauss who argued from a sociological standpoint, Erich Fromm and Gregory Batson from a psychoanalytical point of view (Latouche, 2009, p. 12) and André Gorz from a political ecology perspective (1987a, pp. 13–16). The *Mouvement anti-utilitariste dans les sciences sociales* (MAUSS), strands of which have inspired later degrowth authors such as Latouche, has criticised the hegemony of economic epistemology in the humanities and social science, considered to be expressed in the ideologies of unlimited growth, progress and development (Romano, 2014, p. 21).

2.2.1. Mechanics vs. Physics

Georgescu-Roegen's primary concern was the contradiction between Newtonian (that is, mechanical) economics and the laws of physics. Neoclassical economics has been modelled specifically as "*the mechanics of utility and self-interest*" (W.S. Jevons, in Georgescu-Roegen, 1975). Mechanical phenomena, however, are independent of place and time (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 96). This chronological indifference implies that a circular economic process would be affected by neither matter nor energy. Georgescu-Roegen compares these cycles to a pendulum movement in which one cycle is followed by another. Significantly, any process might be reversed within such a movement, as the laws of mechanics only recognise change in location, not quality (Georgescu-Roegen, 1975).

Reversibility of course directly conflicts with the second law of thermodynamics, that is, the *irreversibility* of a qualitative change in matter and energy. Instead, they dissipate to the point at which they are no longer available for human use. In other words, "quantification [...] cannot do away completely with the peculiar nature of quality" (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 97). Quality, however, is rather

more difficult, if not impossible, to measure. Georgescu-Roegen therefore warns of an overtly mechanistic conception of economics that relies on computer models and mathematical formulas. Indeed, he argues that the acknowledgment of entropy within the economic process does not come through mathematical systems, as “no system of equations can describe the development of an evolutionary process” (Ibid, p. 17).

The perceived difference between mechanics and physics is that mechanics can neither explain, predict nor describe changes in quality. Physics, in contrast, recognises qualitative change in the universe. While the nature of qualitative change is inherently unpredictable, life itself is a manifestation of the second law of thermodynamics. Its material basis is an entropic process which is argued to maintain organisms and regulate life on earth (Eger, 2012; Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 10). This idea goes back to Alfred J. Lotka (1925) Erwin Schrödinger (1944), and was later taken up by evolutionary biochemists such as Simon Black and Jeffrey S. Wicken (Egel, 2012).

Schrödinger argued that life maintains itself by degrading high-quality energy (low entropy) from sunlight and organic matter to low-quality energy (high entropy), that is, waste and ambient low-temperature heat (Egel, 2012; Schrödinger, 1944). According to this view, there is a close connection between biology and physics, and therefore, by extension, economics (Lotka, 1925, p. 24). The separation of economics from *either* biology or physics has been decreed a heresy in the writings of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen. By ignoring biology and physics, the discipline’s analyses suffer from a drastic type of reductionism.

Even more analytically poor, Georgescu-Roegen argues, is to treat economics as separate from the political and social, leaving the social scientist unable to account for phenomena such as colonialism, wars fought over resource access, or indeed inequality in development across continents that are equally rich in resources (1971, p. 317). As each analysis is framed by the respective economist's cultural and socio-political circumstances, economics is necessarily bound up with the political and social, just like the natural sciences are bound up with each other (Ibid, p. 325). Economics cannot be a mere science of "observables", because human propensities, rather than arithmomorphic concepts used for mathematical reasoning, are the drivers of economic change (Ibid, p. 336). Consequently, economics cannot be conceived of as a purely theoretical science. Orthodox economics, however, "takes special pride in operating within a man-less picture" (Ibid, p. 343). Economics therefore ought to rely on dialectical, that is, qualitative reasoning.

In addition to the problem of what Georgescu-Roegen calls the "qualitative residual", that cannot not be reflected in mathematics, the nature of thought was another factor that for him inhibits the accuracy of econometric modelling (1971, p. 94). Dialectical reasoning cannot be reproduced by machines, as he argues that "there is a limit to what we can do with numbers, as there is to what we can do without them" (Ibid). Ignoring this truth, he thought, was to mistake economic life for "locomotion, machines to make machines". For to deny man's dialectic abilities, he argued, was to fail in the ultimate aim of the economist: "to study man in the hope of being able to promote his happiness in life" (Ibid). 21st century degrowth writings reflect not just Georgescu-Roegen's biophysical concerns, but

his preoccupation with happiness and quality of life. Indeed, for degrowth, the central question is how to achieve a good life for all within planetary boundaries (see Hickel, 2019a).

2.2.2. Degrowth versus Steady State

Georgescu-Roegen echoes Podolinsky's criticism of the failure to include natural resources in economic analysis, other than as Ricardian land. For him, one possible explanation for the common, yet false perception that nature's offerings are free of charge and unlimited was the large-scale resource exploitation of colonial possessions overseas (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 2). This argument differs from that of Dunlap and Martin presented above; namely that the technological advances of the Industrial Revolution have fostered a vision of human flourishing that is decoupled from ecological processes (1983, p. 202 in Foster, 1999). For Georgescu-Roegen, it is the rise of capitalism, coupled to the slave trade and colonialism, that initiated what he describes as "the dictatorship of the present over the future" (1975). Economics does not deal with the allocation of scarce resources beyond one generation and is therefore incapable of addressing "the distribution of mankind's dowry *among all generations*" (ibid). The market mechanism itself encourages higher levels of consumption *today*, rather than tomorrow, exacerbating resource depletion and pollution.

Since both pollution and resource depletion are almost completely irreversible and affect future generations, no price mechanism may correct these since future generations cannot influence how to make use or not make use of these resources. Therefore, Georgescu-Roegen argues that quantitative regulations on

both are the only measure that would protect future generations from inheriting a planet that has been stripped of its assets. This demand is consistent with current arguments in favour of total caps on resource use (Alcott, 2010; Kallis and Martinez-Alier, 2010). Neoclassical economics advises Pigouvian taxes to disincentivise and correct externalities, that is, pollution and resource depletion (Daly and Farley, 2011, p. 430), yet deforestation, oil exploration and shale gas drilling largely happen because “the price is right”. The economic struggle then is primarily concerned with low entropy. Georgescu-Roegen warns that “complete protection and absolute reduction of pollution are dangerous myths which must be exposed as such” (1975). He thereby touches upon the central disagreement between him and the proponents of a steady state: the existence of an “ecological fix”, that is, the solution to the inevitable consequence of the second law of thermodynamics. In a physical sense, that consequence is chaos, which will occur when all available matter and energy have been broken down irreversibly.

In the second half of the 20th century, the debate on how to reduce economic throughput effectively to arrive at an ecologically and socially sustainable economy took place between Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and his former student, Herman E. Daly. Georgescu-Roegen argued that human society should solely rely on the services provided by renewable energy flows, rather than live off the flows of stocks from fossil fuels (Georgescu-Roegen, 1975; Kerschner, 2010). He insisted that *“[in] the context of entropy, every action, of man or of an organism, nay, any process in nature, must result in a deficit for the entire system”* (Georgescu-Roegen, 1975). Daly modified this analytical approach to services and stocks, introducing the concept of ‘throughput’.

Throughput of matter and energy flows maintain stocks of people and artefacts, as well as the services – in the form of economic activity – yielded by both (Daly, 1974). Therefore, throughput, or the cost of maintaining stocks, ought to be kept at a minimum, as it

begins with the extraction (depletion) of low entropy resources at the input end, and terminates with an equal quantity of high entropy waste (pollution) (Ibid).

Daly (1974) argued that a steady, or constant, but limited throughput of energy and materials would establish an input-output equilibrium that maintains the status quo. To permit qualitative development whilst at the same time preventing aggregate quantitative growth, this would entail: full recycling, best possible energy conservation and efficiency, and zero waste, amongst other factors (Daly, 2008). For Daly, this means eventually arriving at a stationary, steady-state economy, maintained by balancing constant stocks of physical wealth and people with a chosen, low rate of throughput (Daly, 1974). Georgescu-Roegen, however, fundamentally disagreed with the notion of a steady-state economy, since “even a declining state which does not converge towards annihilation, cannot exist forever in a finite environment” (1975). This argument follows the logic of the Entropy Law. As resources are finite, and all matter and energy dissipate over time, his conclusion “*is that the most desirable state is not a stationary, but a declining one*” (Ibid, emphasis in original). This implies, amongst other things, that complete recycling is impossible, even within a steady-state economy. Consequently, there is no “ecological salvation” (Kerschner, 2010). At a conceptual level, degrowth accepts Georgescu-Roegen’s arguments as the abstract, yet biophysically real, foundation of their ecological growth analysis. Degrowth also derives its criticism

of economic growth in ecological terms from the discipline of ecological economics, which emerged from these debates. A heterodox school of economics, it considers the economy a subsystem of a wider ecosystem (Costanza, 1989; Daly, 1987), illustrated in Figure 2.1:

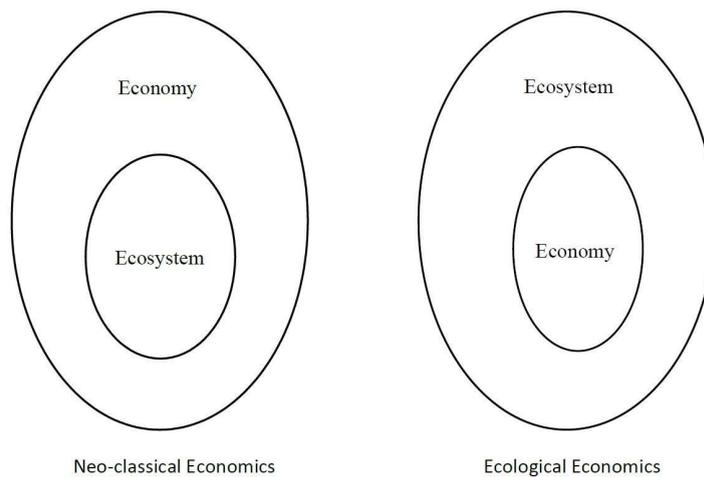


Fig. 2.1 Ecological Economics resituates the economy as a sub-system of ecosystems

Adapted and modified from Daly and Farley (2011, p. 51) in Richter (2019)

Some steady-state economy proponents have argued that a declining state is only made possible because of solar energy, which makes the earth a *closed*, and not an isolated system (Kerschner, 2010). Nevertheless, if entropy is a weak cardinal variable, that is, a measurable physical coordinate, Georgescu-Roegen argues that “we cannot actually reach the ‘zero’ level of entropy any more than we can attribute an origin to Time” (1971, p. 146). Chaos, or disorder, which constitutes maximum levels of entropy, is not the same as nothing, as neither matter nor energy can be destroyed (first law of thermodynamics). Keeping in mind that the first and second laws of thermodynamics also apply to the solar power

technologies that convert the flows of energy into economic throughput, degrowth prefers reducing material production and consumption over long-term, large-scale SSE.

Moreover, proponents of a steady-state economy have tended to focus on the biophysical aspects of infinite economic growth on a finite planet (see for example Daly, 2007). They avoid the difficult socio-political questions this project creates, with the exception of population control (D'Alisa et al., 2014a, p. xxv; Daly, 1974). Lastly, degrowth authors argue that the widely held belief that a SSE can operate within market economy institutions is deceptive since ultimately, policy interventions will not be able to correct decreasing returns on natural capital (Bonaiuti, 2014, p. 27; Latouche, 2014a, p. 11). As an anti-capitalist political theory advocating social change, degrowth is more complex than the SSE discourse. The following subsection lays out Georgescu-Roegen's bioeconomic programme, the core ideas of which have been taken up by 21st century degrowth scholarship.

2.2.3. A bioeconomic programme

Humankind's survival is a bioeconomic problem in that it concerns both biology and economics. Alfred J. Lotka argued that the economic process is a continuation of a biological one (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, p. 11). Georgescu-Roegen argues that our species' survival is therefore closely connected to several crucial differences, or asymmetries, between the sources of low entropy "which together constitute mankind's dowry": free energy from the sun, and the free energy and ordered material structures stored in the earth (1975). The first asymmetry is that "the terrestrial component is a *stock* [measured in human timeframes], whereas

[the] solar one is a *flow*" (Ibid), measured in geological time. Neither the solar flow rate, nor its future availability can be controlled, whereas present consumption of terrestrial stocks determines their availability for future generations. Second, since energy cannot be transformed into matter, accessible material low entropy, that is, high-density, high-quality materials or resources, are the deciding factor in bioeconomics. Every consumer product produced means less available resources for future generations, every car trip to the supermarket means one less motor trip for future generations. Indeed, fewer future generations can ultimately exist if no use is made of solar energy and terrestrial stocks are depleted.

The third asymmetry concerns the vast difference between the solar flow of energy, which is estimated to cease in about 5 billion years, and the free energy available through the terrestrial stock. On the other hand, and this is the fourth asymmetry, the flow of solar energy is of extremely low intensity, in comparison to the large amounts of energy that coal, gas and oil (themselves embedded solar energy) can be converted into. Fifth, solar power is pollution free at use point, in comparison to all other energy available through the terrestrial stock. Lastly, Georgescu-Roegen notes that the survival of every species on earth depends on solar radiation, and that man competes with other species for food (which is also solar energy). Modern industrial agriculture has replaced hands or beasts (solar energy) with machines (scarce resources), further depleting terrestrial low entropy materials. Since these machines use non-renewable energy sources, decreasing returns on agricultural input render their deployment even more wasteful. Indeed, modern industrial farming practices have become less, not more, efficient in producing calories. We use more energy to produce a kilocalorie of food than we

did with pre-industrial, non-mechanised agriculture (Toossi, 2009, pp. 125–126; Woodgate, 2016, p. 75). In short, modern agriculture supports more people than ever before through an increase in terrestrial resource depletion, thus limiting “the future amount of life” (Georgescu-Roegen, 1975).

In response, Georgescu-Roegen proposed a “bioeconomic programme”, rendering general resource depletion as small as possible. Solar energy would correct the dictatorship of the present over future generations, and an overemphasis on supply should give way to demand and a form of voluntary simplicity, as advocated by later degrowth scholars. The bioeconomic programme demands prohibition of war and production of war instruments, equal development status for all countries, population levels corresponding to organic agriculture yields, increasing energy efficiency, abolition of luxury consumer goods, abolition of fashion, abolition of built-in obsolescence, increased leisure time and escape of the rat race of salaried work (Georgescu-Roegen, 1975).

While Georgescu-Roegen did not use the term degrowth, his thought and writing clearly amounted to a conception of economics that carefully considers the implications of the laws of physics and the detrimental effects of consumerism. His bioeconomic programme is mirrored in Latouche’s eight “R’s” (re-evaluate, reconceptualize, restructure, redistribute, re-localise, reduce, re-use and recycle; Latouche, 2009, p. 33). Georgescu-Roegen’s logical conclusion, to be embraced by the degrowth movement thirty years later, was that only a reduction in the material and energy throughput would be compatible with an equitable endowment of resources to future generations. Degrowth proponents also echo

his strong critique of the dogmatism surrounding economic growth, as well as his structural critique of neoclassical economics. He furthermore criticised the linear thinking embedded in a society in which economic growth has become the main imperative. The proceeding three main sections, extending to Chapter Three, consider how degrowth authors have incorporated these critiques and built on his proposed solution, the bioeconomic programme.

2.3. Limits to Growth and the importance of systems thinking

Public awareness of environmental issues has risen sharply since the 1960s. Possibly the most influential book in alerting the public to the disastrous ecological consequences of the wide-spread use of pesticides was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Her writings ignited environmental debates that ranged from single-issue to systematic concerns (Bookchin, 2005, p. 22). Publication of the *Limits To Growth* report marked the beginning of wide-spread awareness and debate concerning the detrimental impact of economic activity on ecosystems (Meadows et al., 1972). The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's research team was led by Donella Meadows, one of the most influential systems scientists and lifelong environmentalist. Using econometric models and simulation works, her team examined population, agricultural production, natural resources, industrial production and pollution (absorption) as the factors that determine economic growth as measured in Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The logical finding was that exponential growth of these factors, coupled with an input of finite resource supplies would eventually lead to systematic breakdown (Ekins, 1993). Even when factoring in technological advances in energy production,

pollution control, agricultural yield *and* birth control, the models still indicated ecological, growth-stinting overshoot (Ibid, pp. 132). Furthermore, their models indicated that the process of economic growth itself would widen the gap between poor and rich nations over time (Meadows et al., 1972, pp. 43). The report thus commented not only on the ecological restraints on humankind's activity, but also on the connection between development and environment, and inequality and industrial growth between Global North and South. At the time, analysts and commentators from the Global North paid little attention to the inequality issues that were highlighted in the report.

Economists criticised the report heavily, attacking the authors' use of standard economic analysis and assumption of exponential growth that they themselves use for economic modelling. Amongst them were Sussex University's Science Policy Research Unit (Cole et al., 1973), Friedrich von Hayek (cited in Latouche, 2013), Fred Hirsch (1976), published in Harvard University Press, Wilfred Beckerman, (1974), as well as *The Economist's* glaring editorial "Limits to Misconception" (1972), which labelled the report the "high-water mark of old-fashioned nonsense". Meadows et al. (1972, p. 162) recommended, amongst other things, halting population growth from 1975 and industrial capital growth from 1990 onwards respectively, and diversifying capital investment to food production. In contrast, economic growth in developing countries would have to continue to certain extents. These measures in combination with others, would be critical to prevent severe ecological overshoot, ensure human wellbeing, and establish a state of global equilibrium for people and capital. However, the report does not explore the implication of these proposed changes, in other words, a

drastic curtailment in capitalist expansion, or the necessity of ‘uneconomical’ investments. Nevertheless, the limits to growth debate has animated ecological economics since the 1990s and degrowth scholarship since the 2000s.

Criticism of the original report, however, was not limited to liberal economists and representatives of corporate interests:

The same multinational agents that for a generation imposed an international standard of bookkeeping, deodorants, and energy consumption on rich and poor alike now sponsor the Club of Rome [pushing] control over needs ever upward, but confusing liberties and rights (Illich, 1978, p. 78).

Ivan Illich, the social critic who was to become the intellectual father of the Degrowth movement, pointed out that the Club of Rome was sponsored by a “well-organised elite”, that is, Fiat, Ford and Volkswagen, whom he regards as “need-designers” and “experts in social control”. By sponsoring the identification of harmful industrial products, they were seen to seek to strengthen the industrial system (Illich, 1978, pp. 78, 87, 1973, p. 122).³ André Gorz agreed that the industrial system “will not change itself into its opposite because a few very big bosses [...] recognized the physical limits to growth” (1987a, p. 78). Furthermore, Illich argued that the very act of creating a public consensus on limits to industrial output prevents the public from developing a critical stance towards the basic structure of modern industrialism in the first place (1973, p. 122). Thus, the Club of Rome’s recommendations “would inevitably provide more power to the growth-optimising bureaucrats and become their pawn”, as the labour-intensive jobs created by a steady-state economy would suppress individual autonomy even further than contemporary industrial-growth societies do (Ibid). Illich’s ideas about

³ For a historiographical analysis of the OECD–Club of Rome nexus, see Schmelzer (2016).

tools and autonomy play a central role in the degrowth discourse and will be explored in more detail in this chapter.

Outside mainstream economics, the report amplified the socio-cultural narrative and resistance to growth-based development that is referred to generally as post-development. Thinkers and activists from the Global South came to criticise development as a strategy for global economic, cultural and social domination that (forcibly) prescribes the European development path to all other countries and cultures (Dussel, 1993; Escobar, 2012). In the 1960s and 1970s, post-development found practical expression in resistance to, and negative assessment of, the Green Revolution. Ecologically, the introduction of new wheat and rice varieties in countries of the Global South diminished agricultural biodiversity and replaced community-based agroecology with industrial agriculture that depends on chemical and high-energy fossil fuel inputs (Guha and Alier, 1997, chap. 6). Increased mechanisation, commercialisation of agriculture and centralisation of power away from farmers inherently accelerated the erosion of social structures and community cohesion, as land is redistributed from the poor to the richer farmers, often leading to violent resource conflicts (Shiva, 1993, chap. 5). For *La Via Campesina* (2009), the Green Revolution has directly contributed to global food insecurity and climate change.

The Limits to Growth acknowledged these criticisms in its first publication, mildly warning of technology's "social side-effects", as for example seen in the widespread inequalities in societies from Mexico to India as a result of the Green Revolution (Meadows et al., 1972, p. 146). Regardless of its criticisms, both the

twenty year and thirty year updates to the book confirmed its analytical findings and went beyond, stressing that human resource exploitation has already exceeded the earth's carrying capacity, putting the world in "overshoot mode" (Meadows et al., 2009, p. xiv). Moreover, a 2021 follow-up of the report by KPMG's Director of Sustainability Services, Gaya Harrington (2021), reaffirmed and validated the original analyses of the report and subsequent follow ups by Meadows et al. The complex threats that climate change already poses – to survival in low-lying coastal areas or islands, and to that of the human species in general – compels us to approach this crisis systematically. The legacy of Donella Meadows, lead author of *The Limits to Growth* (1972), is reflected in the systems thinking of degrowth, or *la décroissance*.

2.4. *La décroissance*

Serge Latouche, who catalysed the European school of degrowth, has hailed degrowth as a "a political slogan with theoretical implications" (2009, p. 7). As a political project, Latouche's conceptualisation of degrowth arises from his radical critique of both economic growth *and* development. Consequently, for Latouche, degrowth is concerned with the construction of convivial, autonomous and economical societies in the Global North and South (Latouche, 2007a). For the Global North, it implies short and long-term "equitable downscaling of production and consumption [enhancing] human wellbeing and [...] ecological conditions" (Lawn, 2011; see also Schneider et al., 2010). Within degrowth, opinions diverge over the economic model under which Degrowth would take place. SSE supporters like Daly (1996), Jackson (2011) or Lawn (2011) call for the decoupling of throughput from growth and an adjustment of the existing capitalist system. In

contrast, post-growth authors such as Heinberg (2011) or Smith (2010) argue for a complete transition away from capitalism, which they perceive to have an inherent need for perpetual growth and market expansion.

Before moving on to concrete proposals, the following subsection uncovers the foundations of degrowth's socio-political arguments in the critiques of modernity articulated by Illich, Ellul, Castoriadis, etc. On the one hand, this complements degrowth's early history. On the other hand, the subsection situates degrowth within this specific field of critique of modernity, on which its practical proposals are built. Degrowth's intellectual foundations therefore go back to at least the second half of the last century.

2.4.1. Industrialisation, Technology and Autonomy

Since the 1970s, the following authors have in effect been arguing for what came to be labelled "*la décroissance*". Latouche based his body of work on the arguments of Ivan Illich, Jacques Ellul, André Gorz, Cornelius Castoriadis and others. Their topics spanned the themes of progress and science, development and industrialisation, technology and work, making the case for a more autonomous, ecological and economical society. The foundational social argument for a degrowth society is that the benefits of an expanding economic sphere and technological progress have not materialised equitably (Gorz, 1989, p. 8). This is manifest in the severe inequality of living standards between and within countries, as well as in the subsequent health, violence or illiteracy issues (Duro et al., 2018; Hickel, 2017b; Pickett and Wilkinson, 2010; UNDP, 2013; World Bank, 2016). The prevalence of precarious work and unemployment – as opposed to work as a

fulfilling, emancipatory activity – further undermines growth-based economic policies (Ellul, 1965, p. 92; Gorz, 1989, p. 8; Graeber, 2018; Illich, 1973, p. 7; OECD, 2017; Wheatley, 2017a, 2017b). When unemployment does fall, sometimes dramatically so as for example during the 2010s in the UK, work does not translate into secure, well-paid jobs and decent living.

The UK's April-June 2017 unemployment rate stood at a record-low of 4.4% (ONS, 2017). At the same time, a 2016 NEF survey showed that of all participants, 20% of employees and 54% of all self-employed people were in “‘bad jobs’, defined as jobs which do not provide a secure, living wage” (Wheatley, 2017a). These paradoxes are not a new phenomenon by any means. The link between labour and welfare has been steadily eroded since the beginning of industrialisation and workers’ alienation from the production process – long before the rise of zero-hour contracts. Ellul, Illich, Gorz and Castoriadis have theorised these links, which is often acknowledged, but seldom elaborated on in the degrowth literature. The following paragraphs aim to provide a more detailed understanding of their work, and how it relates to degrowth.

The notion of autonomy, based on the work of Ivan Illich, is central to degrowth. He argued that autonomy is lost when satisfying needs through consuming material goods that have created these needs in the first place (“modernisation of poverty” ; 1996, pp. 33, 93, 1973, pp. 8, 12). While creating material wealth, this type of affluence can only ever be frustrating and paralysing. Consumption of mass-produced commodities induces a type of impotence, such as “the incapacity to grow food, to sing, or to build”, to give birth or to build a home autonomously

(Illich, 1996, p. 28). Illich argued that in a society where conviviality, or social bonds, are reduced beyond a certain threshold, no amount of industrial production may satisfy the needs it has been creating (1973, p. 11). Modern existence is thus only possible within market relations. Rather than acting and creating autonomously, individuals rely on the “riches of productivity” (Illich, 1996, p. 8). Similarly, Gorz argues for the “rediscovery” of ourselves as the subject, criticising the economic reductionism of considering women, men, children and nature in their function as workers for the system – wherein “lies one of the roots of totalitarianism and barbarism” (1989, p. 137).

The central argument for a degrowth transition is that policies that promote collective ownership of resources and job guarantees, or provide a universal citizen income, would recover individual autonomy, defined as the ability to determine and satisfy one’s own needs (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 164). For Ellul, Illich or Castoriadis, this autonomy has been diminishing with the advent of industrial production processes. The professionalisation of abilities like healing, learning or crafting render personal satisfaction dependent on the consumption of standardised products created by anonymous others (Ellul, 1965, p. 92, 95; Illich, 1996, p. 74, 1973, pp. 10). Beyond basic physical and mental survival, there are therefore no “natural needs” at all. The particular “citizen impotence” of industrial societies necessarily blurs the distinction between needs, wishes, wants and desires. This fuels the artificial creation of demand via new forms of scarcity, exacerbated by built-in obsolescence that further entrenches inequalities (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 100; Gorz, 1989, p. 114; Illich, 1973, p. 10). The immanent, direct understanding of democracy that can be found in the degrowth literature

(Kallis, 2018, pp. 119, 135) has therefore been derived from Castoriadis, Gorz, Ellul and Illich. However, their arguments also highlight that social crisis underlying the ecological one, exacerbated by technology.

The analysis of technology as more than ensembled machines by these degrowth predecessors shares aspects with continental philosophy and social analysis.

Technology as a socio-technical system or sociological phenomenon relates to ideas, culture, economics, politics and aesthetics – every aspect of life (Ellul, 1965, p. 1; Foucault, 1988; Heidegger, 1977, pp. 12–18; Rooney, 1997; Weber, 1978). Its omnipresence is argued to result in the standardisation, rationalisation and *impersonality* of economic and administrative life, in which organisation, profitability and planning have replaced human agency and manual labour (Ellul, 1965, pp. 1, 11, 12, 14; Heidegger, 1977, p. 18; Weber, 1978, p. 1156). In fact, technology has become so complex, autonomous and self-directing that humans are reduced to the level of catalysts, or passive passengers (Ellul, 1965, pp. 4, 14, 80, 133; Illich, 1974, p. 11; Maley, 2004; Weber, 1964, p. 139). For Ellul, technology itself therefore plays a significant role in producing the peculiar, modern form of consumer infantilization. Individuals can neither control nor define their own needs, much less influence the direction of the economy or government, control the quality of the food and beverages they consume, or have a say over their mode and cost of transport (Ellul, 1965, p. 107). As the technical milieu slowly absorbs the disenchanting, natural world, the latter is destroyed and subordinated to economic activity in a drive to increase efficiency.

The conditions contained in Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that provided loans to the 'Third World', for example, were intended to catalyse technical progress. Instead, they contributed to the destruction of local economies, population displacement and modification of local moral habits that led to the disappearance and discrediting of indigenous knowledge (Ellul, 1965, p. 127; Shiva, 1997, p. 65). The *technique* that brought about the Green Revolution in India emphasised ends – higher yields – over means: population displacement and land redistribution (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 99; Ellul, 1965, p. 19). Its violence is exemplified in the resulting farmers' suicide endemic.

Ellul would furthermore argue that through Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS), climate change mitigation and adaptation, meant to secure life for future generations, has been entrusted into the hands of a technocratic class that ties life to technical development (1965, p. 153). Modern trade rules and inventions such as patents and intellectual property rights for non-renewable, herbicide resistant seeds ensure corporate control over food production and the eradication of small-scale farming (Mittal, 2008; Shiva, 2004, 1997, pp. 9). The indiscriminate, unrestrained character of *technique* that will be applied, where it can be applied (Ellul, 1965, p. 100), manifests itself today in the use of mass surveillance programmes by governments directed towards their own citizens, and facilitated by telecommunications corporations (IPT, 2015). The World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report (Collins, 2018) cites the adverse consequences of technological advances on un- or under-employment, connected to the simultaneous trends of rising inequality, societal polarisation and cyber dependency. SAPs, the Green Revolution and ICT surveillance are examples of the oppressive political and social

application of technology, and seemingly validate Illich's and Ellul's arguments about technology as *technique*.

The ancient Greeks' approach to technique stands in stark contrast to this particular type of social control. *Techné* designated the arts, craft and skill of the mind and body, that were embedded in meaning and a natural order (Heidegger, 1977, p. 13; Maley, 2004; Rooney, 1997). Its application thus required knowledge – an “art of doing things” – and, consequently, a fair degree of individual autonomous thinking and acting (Rooney, 1997). Ancient Greeks from the sixth century BC onwards are said to have deliberately rejected technique that stifles autonomous thinking, and attempted to diminish its influence (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 161; Ellul, 1965, p. 29). Seen as a positive act of self-mastery, this effort was borne out of concern with harmony, balance and moderation, as well as autonomy (Ellul, *Ibid*). Degrowth aims to revive these concerns, perhaps best expressed in the desire for various forms of voluntary simplicity or “convivial austerity” (Illich, 1996, p. 36). Conviviality is “individual freedom realized in personal interdependence, and as such, an intrinsic ethical value” (Illich, 1973, p. 24). Convivial austerity in turn describes a society in which individual power is limited by the needs of others, thus protecting “personal use-value against disabling enrichment” and rendering the ownership of tools (technology, machines or productive forces) unattractive (Illich, 1996, p. 36). Convivial austerity thus not only requires a downshift, but political and cultural moderation. In addition, Ellul's arguments for an escape from the technological system have strongly influenced degrowth criticism of technology (D'Alisa and Kallis, 2014, p. 187). The following subsection delves into the work of André Gorz.

2.4.2. Industrialisation and the Economic Rationale

This section contextualises some of Illich's arguments for convivial austerity within similar political ecology arguments made in 1970s and 1980s. At the time, André Gorz, French New Left philosopher and political ecologist, argued that economic growth is a dead end not because of capitalism, but because economic activity depends on finite natural resources and thus has physical limits (1987a, pp. 11, 13). Like Georgescu-Roegen, he called for voluntary simplicity and the abolition of built-in obsolescence (Gorz, 1994, p. 12). Gorz labelled his perspective ecological realism, and acknowledged Georgescu-Roegen when he stated that even "zero growth" will eventually result in a complete exhaustion of scarce natural resources (Gorz, 1987a, p. 13). Neither socialism nor capitalism would be compatible with a degrowing economy, as even growth-based socialism would merely extend middle class lifestyles, values and social patterns that "reflect the distorted image of our past", not our future (1987a, pp. 11, 14; 1994, p. 8). Marxist analysis had lost its merit due to the fact that in a post-industrial society, scientific and technological advances put the antagonistic dualism of industrial working class and capital owning bourgeoisie out of date. Moreover, the nature of contemporary finance capitalism had rendered direct appropriation of the productive forces by the worker impossible, and regardless, Gorz argued that individuals could not be reduced to their social class identity (Gorz, 1987, pp. 15, 90). Similarly, Ellul argued that social equality will not result from owning the means of production or their profits, since the emergence of a ruling class of technicians will support, absorb and integrate technical progress, while the proletariat (today's precariat) is expanding, rather than disappearing (1965, p. 198). After all, pursuing economic

growth was the corner stone economic policy of both the Soviet Union and the United States (Jensen et al., 1983, p. 125).⁴

Commensurate with wider ecological awareness at the time of writing in the 1970s, Gorz argued that an ecological focus would appropriately respond to rising inequalities, and health and environmental crises. The answer is not growth, but a limit on material production, and, most importantly, a *break with the economic rationality* (1987a, p. 16). The latter ought to be subordinated to an eco-social rationality that breaks with the logic of the market and capitalism's compulsory demand for growing levels of production and consumption (Gorz, 1994, p. 12). The recognition of ecology as a pointer for an economic system that is more effective and productive in preserving, rather than exploiting, natural resources differentiates Gorz from the single-issue environmental activism and publications of the time. The full implications of this approach are a drastic reduction in working time, a universal basic income, and the right to useful unemployment (Gorz, 1989, p. 191; Illich, 1996, p. 84) – ideas which would be picked up in the 21st century by degrowth authors and many others.

2.4.3. Industrialisation, Institutions and Conviviality

Ivan Illich was a Catholic priest and social critic. He founded and operated the *Centro Intercultural de Documentación* (CIDOC) in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Between 1961 and 1976, it functioned as a cultural and language learning institute for North American missionaries travelling to South America. The CIDOC was, in his

⁴ In 1958, Khrushchev reportedly contended that “[growth] of industrial and agricultural production is the battering ram with which we shall smash the capitalist system” (cited in Schmelzer, 2016, p. 163)

own words, “a center of de-Yankeefication” (Vizinczey, 1988, p. 301). He founded similar centres in New York and Petropolis, Brazil (Mitcham, 2002, p. 9). After a childhood in Vienna he lived and worked in Italy, Austria, New York and Puerto Rico. This unique experience allowed him to observe the effects of consumerism and capitalism in the global North and South. Like Gorz, Illich could lend great insight to the far-reaching ecological, social and psychological implications of seemingly benevolent state institutions like the welfare system, or technologies symbolic of progress such as the automobile. His critical stance towards welfare made him an unpopular ally for the Left. His multidimensional arguments nevertheless consistently supported the autonomy of the individual while stressing their embeddedness in their community, and by extension, nature.

In his writings, Illich criticised modern society and its institutions, especially industrial mass production and consumption, the commodification and institutionalisation of personal and social relations, and the alienation of people from the labour process (Hoinacki and Mitcham, 2002; Illich, 1996, 1973). He argued that modern social institutions, such as schooling or medicine, discipline and de-skill their subjects (1976, 1973, chap. 1, 1971). Schools ceased to be effective tools of education (Illich, 1973, p.21). Instead, they are geared towards the production of a professional elite and imputation of universal acceptance of one of the most fundamental assumptions of economic growth: resource scarcity – not in relation to environmental limits, but artificial, supposed scarcity that is blamed for poverty (Kallis, 2019, p. 13). Education, Illich insists, “turns into the name for learning to live under an assumption of [artificially created] scarcity” (Illich, 1982, p. 11).

With regards to medicine, Illich (1973, p.19) argued that “bureaucratic medicine” has developed into a professional complex that exerts social control via declarations of sickness or health in its “clients”. Healing is no longer focused on enabling healthy living environments and those kinship and community structures that allow medicine to be embedded in care. Crucially, once institutions or technologies have crossed their *counterproductivity threshold* (Leonardi, 2019, p. 63), the benefits of industrialisation are outweighed by its costs, such as road deaths, traffic jams, alienation on the assembly line, and the prolongation of end-of-life suffering from increased medical intervention. The social institutions that have partly been enabled by industrialisation have come to serve its perpetuation, rather than supporting human (and ecological) wellbeing.

Illich insists that needs are artificially created by advertising and consumption, behind which a professional elite works to sustain their position of power and prestige (1996, pp. 50-59). Consequently, in a convivial society, autonomous individuals and communities will only be able to satisfy self-determined needs when the nexus between commodities and satisfaction is broken (Illich, 1996, p. 32). The decommodification of needs satisfaction requires the imagining of new toolkits, for example convivial austerity and a struggle for the liberty to generate use-value autonomously and equally ('politics of conviviality'; Illich, 1996, pp. 15, 36, 1973, p. 11).

Another of Illich's ideas which has deeply influenced degrowth has been the notion of the 'radical monopoly' of industrialisation. It captures the substitution of useful activities that people freely – both in the political and economic sense of

the word – engage in with industrial products or professional service delivery (Illich, 1996, pp. 72–73). Cars, for example, have replaced walking or cycling in many instances, but their “physical and social infrastructure leaves people with few options but to use [them] if they want to participate in social life” (Kallis, 2018, p. 6). The ‘radical monopoly’ of industrial technology can be said to lie at the heart of degrowth’s cultural, political and social critique.

Illich’s seminal essay *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) was born out of his work at the CIDOC. He uses ‘conviviality’, a term Illich borrowed from Brillat-Savarin (Latouche, 2009, p. 42), to describe the opposite of industrial productivity. A turn towards self-defined work could be brought about through convivial production and a “universal renunciation of unlimited progeny, affluence, and power” of individuals and groups (Illich, 1973, p. 14). With regards to convivial production and technology, *convivial tools* in turn are those that are chosen by individuals and expand their freedom, autonomy and human creativity. This can include things like bicycles, sewing machines, telephone and radio (as opposed to motorways, aircraft or open pit mines; Deriu, 2014a, p. 80).

Illich’s research on alternatives to industrial modes of existence must be placed within the intellectual context of searches for alternatives to development within Latin America. As a critic of development, Illich influenced the field of post-development. His writings on work, technology, autonomy and alienation, however, also influenced degrowth. Indeed, among the 20th century degrowth forerunners presented here, Illich occupies a special place given that 21st century degrowth proponents put forward a variety of Illich’s arguments to strengthen

their socio-cultural and political growth critique. Above all, they have engaged with Illich's critique of technology and his counter-proposal of convivial tools (Bradley, 2016; Gomiero, 2017; Liegey and Nelson, 2020, p. 119; Samerski, 2016; Vetter, 2017; Zoellick and Bisht, 2017). Other degrowth proponents have taken up Illich's critique of industrial production and attendant development of an expert class that cannot but hierarchically manage surpluses and exports (Kallis, 2017a; Kallis and March, 2015). These ideas have given impetus to degrowth discussions on democracy and autonomy. Illich argued that "only small-scale systems can be governed directly by people without the mediation of experts" (Kallis, 2018, p. 6). Consequently, direct democracy has come to play a central role in imagining a degrowth transition (Ibid, p. 119, 135).⁵ Furthermore, Illich's writings on institutions helped develop degrowth arguments around *sociocultural* limits to growth (Liegey and Nelson, 2020, pp. 34–36, 42, 47). In this sense, learning is necessarily bound up with degrowth, as a "society committed to high levels of shared learning and critical personal intercourse must set pedagogical limits on industrial growth" (Illich, 1973, p. x, see also 1971). Chapters Five, Six and Seven of this thesis contribute to the debate around sociocultural limits to growth.

Some degrowth authors also consider Illich's criticism of the impact of development-as-growth on societies in the Global South. Of particular interest for degrowth is thereby his challenge of the Western model of development as universal, and universally desirable (Kallis, 2018, p. 8; Latouche, 2009, pp. 14, 62). Illich's most creative legacy undoubtedly is the symbol of the snail. Its image has

⁵ Ideas around direct democracy are also taken from Castoriadis' writings on autonomy (2003, p. 318).

been lifted from a section in *Gender*, the book in which he discusses how gender limits economic growth in non-industrial societies:

A snail, after adding a number of widening rings to the delicate structure of its shell, suddenly brings its accustomed activities to a stop. A single additional ring would increase the size of the shell sixteen times. Instead of contributing to the welfare of the snail, it would burden the creature with such an excess of weight that any increase in its productivity would henceforth be literally outweighed by the task of coping with the difficulties created by enlarging the shell beyond the limits set by its purpose. At that point, the problems of overgrowth begin to multiply geometrically, while the snail's biological capacity can be best extended arithmetically (Illich, 1982, p. 82).

Degrowth literature often quotes this passage to emphatically illustrate arguments against compound economic growth in a world bound by physical and social limits (Latouche, 2009, p. 22; Liegey and Nelson, 2020, pp. 31–32). In practice, much, but not all degrowth writing builds on the writings of all these – predominantly male – thinkers explored in this main section. Before examining the more diverse strand of degrowth *in practice* in Chapter Three, the following main section explores the ideas that have come to shape the understanding of a degrowth political economy.

2.5. Re-conceptualising ‘the local’

Illich’s concepts of convivial austerity and tools influenced degrowth conceptualisations of production modes, wellbeing and technology. It was Latouche, however, whose work really catalysed the development of dedicated, Anglophone degrowth scholarship following the publication of *Farewell to Growth* in 2009. This chapter’s genealogy therefore concludes with him. In particular, this main section considers Latouche’s re-conceptualisation of ‘the local’ and its importance for degrowth in more detail. In *Farewell to Growth*, he champions the idea of localisation in the form of loosely confederated ‘bioregions’. During the

early 2010s, 'the local' has become one of the most important levels of intervention within degrowth. In the early 2020s, discussions of the relationship between degrowth and the state have gained traction, but are far from settled (D'Alisa and Kallis, 2020; Nelson and Frankel, 2020). Latouche's uncritical preference of the 'local' over other possible scales of political and economic action has attracted criticism (Romano, 2012), as has the depoliticised nature of his bioregion proposal (Kallis and March, 2015). To those, I would add a markedly structuralist discourse on the environment, exemplified in the notion of 'bioregions', which leaves under-examined our relationship with nature and the role and relative importance of, and opportunities for, its agency in this proposal. As such, Latouche's local 'bioregions' continue to analyse human-nature relationships within a dichotomous subject/object frame. This critique will be more fully developed in subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, 'the local' has been the primary place for political, economic and activist intervention towards degrowth, and therefore merits attention.

For Latouche, the peculiar modern phenomenon of "instituted alienation" (borrowed from Castoriadis, 1997, p. 70) positions degrowth as a political project. Changes in the modes of production are thought to be possible through cultural revolution, that is, a change in social relations, which leaves out changes in human-nature relations as another, non-anthropocentric realm for revolutionary change (Latouche, 2009, pp. 32, 44, 2007a; from Gorz, 1987a, p. 31 and; Castoriadis, 2003, p. 189). Latouche argues for abandoning the economy, a cultural revolution and change of values that amounts to a "de-Westernisation" of the West's psychosocial structures (Latouche, 2014b, p. 119). The rejection of what

Illich calls technofascism, in favour of conviviality, is an explicitly political choice, as ecology can also be used for biological engineering and creating systems of domination and control (Gorz, 1987a, p. 17). Latouche's ideas of a cultural, political and economic system called *la décroissance* merged André Gorz's libertarian/democratic socialism (Gorz, 1987a, p. 18) and Murray Bookchin's libertarian municipalism (2005, p. 57). They emphasise decentralised self-regulation, autonomy and freedom over centralised over-regulation, hierarchy and domination. More abstractly, they represent a mix of Gorz's political ecology and Bookchin's social ecology. Latouche also draws on development critiques such as Gustavo Esteva's and Madhu Suri Prakash's "autonomy of the commons" (1998), and Ivan Illich's concepts of conviviality and the vernacular.⁶ In this regard, Latouche stresses that political innovation and economic autonomy are two interdependent sides of a "local ecological democracy" (2009, p. 44). The following subsection explores how Latouche's ideas of localism relate to democracy and the economy.

2.5.1. Localising democracy

Degrowth is necessarily a political project because of its sharp critique of modern representative democracy. In its place, authors argue for local political and economic autonomy. The two are interdependent not least because jobs and wealth can only be shared if they are limited by a political process, but also because the eradication of "modernised poverty" can only be brought about through politically generated, convivial austerity (Illich, 1996, pp. 16, 94).

⁶ Illich uses the term 'vernacular' to denote "activities that aren't motivated by exchange logics, yet satisfy "everyday needs" and in doing so, escape "bureaucratic control" (1981, p. 57).

Castoriadis' writings on autonomy and democracy form the basis of most degrowth authors' understanding of how a collective could govern itself, if on a more abstract level (Weiss and Cattaneo, 2017). In practice, Bookchin's visions of libertarian municipalism have directly influenced degrowth theorists and practitioners. Within libertarian municipalism, civic control over public affairs and the means of life is exercised on the local, regional and confederal level through direct, face-to-face citizen assemblies that he describes as literally "peopled institutions" (Bookchin, 2005, pp. 57, 435). Bookchin's ideas about "confederalism" refers to the maintenance of interdependent relationships between municipalities and their economies on a regional level. These ideas influenced Latouche's ideas of "ecomunicipalism" and the "bioregions" contained in it (Latouche, 2009, p. 44). Re-localising democracy and the economy can be said to be the twin cores of degrowth discourse. As such, this subsection elaborates on the former, while the next subsection elaborates on the latter.

Within degrowth, there are a multitude of views on the institutionalisation and conceptualisation of democracy (Bonaiuti, 2012; Deriu, 2014b, 2012; Johannisova and Wolf, 2012; Ott, 2012; Romano, 2012). Yet, consensus converges on the absence of "choice between the environment and democracy; sustainable degrowth should be a democratic process of transition or nothing at all" (Kallis and Martinez-Alier, 2010). Therefore, most authors are concerned with what Cosme et al. (2017) have described as the decentralisation and deepening of democratic institutions locally on the one hand (Deriu, 2012; Domènech et al., 2013a; Muraca, 2012; Schneider et al., 2010; van Griethuysen, 2012; Xue, 2014), and the promotion of alternative political systems and the capabilities to provide

them on the other (Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010; Demaria et al., 2013; Kallis, 2013; Schneider et al., 2011; Xue, 2014). Not all degrowth proponents and practitioners agree with the outright rejection of parliamentary democracy (Fotopoulos, 2010a). Yet, assembly decision-making, “associations of networked projects” and cooperatives are already widely practiced in Spain and Greece, amongst others (Kallis, 2018, pp. 135, 169). These deliberative practices prefigure both the exit from the mainstream, profit and growth-oriented economy, as well as the kind of localised economic democracy envisioned by degrowth. In Chapter Three, subsection ‘3.2.2. Democracy’ discusses practical implications of these suggestions.

2.5.2. Localising the economy

As has been shown, the process of industrial production is central to the authors presented in this genealogy, as indeed it has been to any libertarian critique of labour (Bookchin, 2005, p. 309). Technological progress has largely resulted in surveillance, social control and the disciplining of work, and the creation of a deep sense of disenchantment with technological innovation (Bookchin, 2005, p. 302; Graeber, 2015a, chap. 2; Illich, 1973, p. 90). Consequently, machines, or tools, in Illich’s language, have, instead of freeing slaves, enslaved men (Illich, 1973, p. 13). As a result of mechanisation, the division of labour is deeply depersonalising and alien to human fulfilment, since most jobs require little autonomous thinking (Ellul, 1965, p. 210; Gorz, 1987b, p. 100; Graeber, 2018). Therefore, degrowth conceptualises a ‘local’ economy as increased localised (food and consumer goods) production. Moreover, a localised economy is a holistic system built on

sharing of “work, public space, living space, resources and expertise” (Kallis, 2018, p. 119). Central to sharing is the “commoning” of resources.

Latouche drew on Esteva and Prakash’s notion of “autonomy of the commons” (1998) in order to advance the argument for his “bioregions”. Their postmodern critique of liberalism, government and representative democracy considers these systems a product of colonisation, globalisation and the subsequent emergence of the post-colonial nation state. The modern state itself is understood to have undermined the “democracy of the commons” through dissolving local, self-managing political bodies for the benefit of a capitalist system (Esteva, 2009; Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p. 151). It follows that radical democracy is the expression of people’s power, that is, not a form of government, but the *end* of government (Lummis, 1996, cited in Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p. 157). For the degrowth project, Latouche has embraced the idea of radical democracy, but also laid the ground for the idea of “reclaiming the commons”. Resources, goods, and infrastructures are shared, that is, they should be governed “as a commons, with egalitarian direct democratic processes” (Kallis, 2018, pp. 119–120). For Latouche (2009, p. 45), the “democratic dilemma” of maintaining direct citizen control over expanding political constituencies ought to be resolved through regionalisation. Based on libertarian municipalism and the autonomy of the commons, Latouche promoted the idea of “re-localisation”. Re-localisation is framed as the return to the local in the form of self-organised, self-sufficient “bioregions” that could operate within either urban or rural realms (Latouche, 2009, p. 44). Re-localisation implies the pursuit of food self-sufficiency, followed by economic, fiscal and

energy self-sufficiency via decentralised renewable energy solutions and local currencies (Ibid, pp. 47–49). Activities such as co-harvesting could re-establish grower-consumer relations while protecting and developing each region’s basic agricultural activities (Hoogendijk, 2003 in Latouche, 2009, p. 48). Yet autonomy would not imply autarky, as intra-regional surplus trade could become possible if it “respects regional independence” (Ibid). The ostensible benefits of regionalisation are:

less transport, transparent production lines, incentivising sustainable production and consumption, reducing dependency upon capital flow and multinationals, and greater security in every sense of the word”, while it also fosters “a more democratic approach to the economy, reduces unemployment, increases participation (and therefore integration), encourages solidarity, opens up new perspectives for developing countries, and, finally, improves the health of citizens in the rich countries by encouraging sobriety and reducing stress (2009, p. 50).

To these claims, he adds Yves Cochet’s suggestion of replacing the WTO by a World Localisation Organisation that would promote “global protection for the local” (2005, p. 224, cited in Latouche, 2009, p. 52). While trade has been a historical, and integral part of human existence, Latouche is not clear trading between bioregions beyond surplus trade. Nevertheless, Chapter Three explores several practical examples of his vision, inspired by Ellul, Gorz, and Illich.

Latouche’s bioregions clearly rely on conceptions of communal tool ownership, convivial austerity, decentralisation, shared learning and participation. A re-imagination of notions of wellbeing and autonomy are required for the deconstruction of economic universalism, which he understands as the extension of economics into all spheres of social life, and the demystification of development and growth, which implies the abandonment of faith in economic development to

deliver happiness in relation to GDP growth (Latouche, 2006). For Latouche, this is what degrowth seeks to establish: “societies that are open, autonomous, and thrifty” (Ibid) in the Global North *and* South.

From within degrowth, Latouche’s proposals have been criticised for their lack of details with regards to economic and political forms of organisation which would underly and/or establish the bioregions (Kallis and March, 2015). The analytically weak understanding of the state and politics in degrowth may have its origins in Latouche’s uncritical, depoliticised, yet widely influential idea of the local. Brand and Acosta (2018a, p. 158) argue that emancipatory projects cannot merely be transformations or breaks. They need to have mechanisms to solve civilisationary conflicts without violence in order to secure what’s been achieved, as well as strengthen emancipated dimensions and social relations. In addition to an uncritical interrogation of power relations, there are concerns about the role of technology in Latouche’s proposals.

For example, Samerski (2016) argues that Latouche’s ecological analysis ought to be complemented by a systematic review of the harmful social effects of technology and its role in industrial production. Regionalisation, amongst other things, presupposes the mammoth tasks of “retooling [...] contemporary society with convivial rather than industrial tools” (Illich, 1996, p. 94) and of decentralising society in all aspects including culture, finance and administration (Ellul, 1965, p. 199). How could this be achieved in practice, politically, socially and economically? Convivial tools are argued to be those machines, productive apparatuses or institutions that “foster and expand the natural ability of their user”, while

industrial tools, as has been argued above, reduce mankind to programmed machine operators with little to no individual autonomy (Samerski, 2016). Latouche based his analysis on Illich's "convivial society". A convivial society is based on mutualistic principles and autonomous and creative relationships between people, which limit individual freedom of "access to the tools of the community" only with regards to other people's freedom (Illich, 1973, p. 11). In a "convivial" society, "modern technologies serve politically interrelated individuals rather than managers" (Illich, 1973, p. xii). Economic regionalisation can only work in conjunction with local political autonomy and a reduction in the dissemination of disempowering tools. But how would an autonomous society look like in practice? Chapter Three considers this question after the following preliminary conclusion.

2.6. Towards a convivial society

From the ecological reasoning and intellectual critiques that have been presented in this chapter thus far, it ought to be clear what "degrowing the economy" doesn't mean. Degrowth isn't about "going back to the stone age" or living without technology. The problems of climate change and inequality will not be solved by abandoning technology or otherwise turning back the clock on innovations that can deliver crucial mitigation options (renewable energy, recycling wastewater, capturing and storing carbon, etc.). The question that is posed by degrowth advocates, however, is how much decision-making power will rest with individual citizens and communities, and for whose benefit technology is deployed. Considering climate change, degrowth thinkers ask whether human survival will depend on a technological fix that sucks carbon out the air or

otherwise geo-engineers the atmosphere, or whether these efforts will be complemented by people working together to construct a society that is geared towards balancing social and ecological pressures.

This chapter has reviewed several strands of thought that have influenced degrowth, and that provided various answers to this question. One answer is provided by Georgescu-Roegen, who argues that the Entropy Law teaches “anyone willing to listen what *aims* are better for the economy of mankind” (1971, p.18, my emphasis). With regards to autonomy, Illich’s concept of a ‘convivial’ society, Ellul’s critique of technique and Gorz’s ecological realism have provided the blueprints for an autonomous society. While being firmly grounded in the laws of physics, degrowth advocates thus also answer the question of what we want from the economy, that is, what aims are best for an economy controlled by people, not institutions. The answer lies in voluntary simplicity, going back to Georgescu-Roegen’s bioeconomics and Gorz’s and Illich’s critique of industrial consumerism. Voluntary simplicity renounces the *techniques that enslave* the old and the young, the sick and the healthy, the worker and the manager, and instead replace them with meaningful activities. These could be community gardening, crafting or engaging with the elderly. Yet, today, given the choice, who would rather visit a sheltered housing scheme than stay at home streaming the latest Netflix release? A sense of community is prerequisite for changing individualistic patterns of behaviour. How can this be recreated in megacities in which ‘community’ has been eroded by decades of failed neoliberal housing policies?

“Exiting the economy” in favour of a degrowth society thus entails, foremost, the de-commodification of labour, land and money (in the form of compound interest, dividends or private pension funds) in order to reintegrate the economy into social processes (Latouche, 2013; see also Polanyi, 2002). Degrowth thinkers argue that non-market relations between people, between people and the land, and between people and animals, improve lives, not just for humans (Paulson et al., 2020, pp. 72–75). The latter point regarding human-nature relationships isn’t something that this early intellectual history of degrowth *scientifique* has dwelled much on. Instead, this strand of degrowth puts forward an ecological, political and cultural critique of economic growth that is characterised by scholarly publications, as well as nature/culture and subject/object hierarchies. To explore the larger pluriverse of degrowth, Chapter Three starts by ascertaining what ‘exiting the economy’ and decommodification means for a degrowth transition in practice.

Chapter Three explores ideas such as local/community currencies, universal basic income or work reductions, while assessing the impact of Jevons’ paradox on degrowth in practice. Subsequently, Chapter Four highlights the most important analytical absences in degrowth theory and practice. In response, I suggest three areas of research that would advance degrowth scholarship and activism: provincialising, depatriarchalising, and democratising degrowth. The next two chapters therefore provide answers to the question of what the limits and merits are of degrowth as an effective political and economic system. Chapter Three explores degrowth’s beginning as an activist science, before analysing debates

around the various political programmes and lived experiences that have been suggested for the construction of, and transition to, a degrowth society.

Chapter 3: Degrowth in Practice

We are sharers, not owners. We are not prosperous. None of us is rich. None of us is powerful. If it is Anarres you want, if it is the future you seek, then I tell you that you must come to it with empty hands.

(Le Guin, 1975, p. 241)

Degrowth is much more than a theory. It is embodied practice in which economic and social structures are changed to reduce material consumption. Degrowth also aims to move towards a convivial society. The previous chapter has introduced the theoretical background for this embodied practice. First, I contextualised degrowth's ecological analysis of growth within Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's early works on the relationship between economics and the laws of thermodynamics. The Entropy Law has been identified as chief challenge to unlimited economic growth, and Georgescu-Roegen's bioeconomic programme as early precursor to degrowth ideas. Second, I highlighted how degrowth builds on systems thinking and the 'limits to growth' debates of the 1970s. Third, I discussed the political and philosophical critiques of industrialisation, technology and autonomy delivered by André Gorz, Ivan Illich, Jacques Ellul, and Cornelius Castoriadis, on whose arguments many contemporary degrowth debates rest. Chapter Two concluded with a review of current arguments in favour of re-localising democracy and the economy, first put forward by Serge Latouche, and culminating in demands for a convivial society. These are some of degrowth's theoretical foundations. But how would such a society look like in practice? One such vision is laid out in Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed* (1975). She presents life on a harsh world constrained by resource limits; however, social and economic organisation on the

planet Anarres is based on common resource management and egalitarian principles, and attuned to the natural rhythms of the planet, which are endured and celebrated together.

This chapter picks up on the relationship between theory and practice within degrowth. It is structured around four axes. First, I discuss how degrowth emerged from activism and practices on the ground, but also how theory has inspired degrowth as an activist movement. Second, the extensive literature review conducted for this chapter informed my threefold conceptualisation of 'degrowth practice' as political movement(s), policy proposals, and lived experiences ('nowtopias'). In the second, third, and fourth main sections, I therefore discuss whether degrowth constitutes a political programme, then examine how such programme could be implemented via policy proposals and lived experiences respectively. The chapter closes with a preliminary conclusion to the first two chapters of this thesis. It locates degrowth praxis within André Gorz's notion of non-reformist reforms (Muraca, 2013). In addition to reviewing literature, this chapter thereby situates my own, original approach to degrowth. In doing so, I open avenues of intervention for proceeding chapters and conclusion to this thesis. I start, however, by addressing the relationship between activism and science within degrowth.

3.1. The Beginning of an Activist Science

Degrowth ideas spread from Lyon, France from the early 2000s to Catalonia and Spain. The nascent movement organised car-free cities protests, communal street meals and anti-advertising campaigns, as well as conferences and publications

(Demaria et al., 2013). D'Alisa et al. (2014, p. 2) recount how in 2004, researcher-activist François Schneider promoted degrowth in France during “a year-long walking tour on a donkey”. Liegey and Nelson (2020, pp. 7–11) detail the adbuster activism of two French marketing professionals, who inspired Serge Latouche’s first pamphlet calling for convivial degrowth in 2002. The 2008 degrowth conference that introduced the term in English was born out of this early work of activists, writers and researchers. To many extents, this is still an emblematic feature of degrowth. Proponents (and critics) label degrowth an ‘activist science’ or even ‘activist-led science’, since activist demands have consolidated “into proposals analyzed in articles and special issues of academic journals” (Martinez-Alier et al., 2014). The scope of academic degrowth literature has grown exponentially since the early 2000s.

In March 2021, a SCOPUS search for journal articles, books, book chapters, conference presentations, comments, editorials, reviews, letters, short surveys and conference reviews returned 692 documents with the term ‘degrowth’ in the abstract, title, or keyword list. The actual number of publications will be much higher given SCOPUS’ search limits and the linguistic variety of degrowth literature. Weiss and Cattaneo (2017) found that nearly all Anglophone degrowth publications in 2017 were affiliated with European institutions. At that point, the majority of the peer-reviewed journal articles originated from Spain. The Mediterranean countries, due to their peripheral location in relation to and financial dependency on Europe’s capitalist centre, have been argued to be more susceptible to degrowth ideas and challenges (Romano, 2012). Moreover, the

prevalence of libertarian and autonomist political cultures provide fertile ground for degrowth activism and research, from Spain to Italy and Greece.

The positionality of degrowth researchers, mine included, often blurs the line between researcher and activist (Demmer and Hummel, 2017). On the one hand, degrowth researchers aim to produce empirical, high-quality, peer-reviewed studies in economics, politics, sociology, anthropology, sustainability studies etc. These aim to increase its validity and further scholarship on the 'why' and 'how' of degrowth. On the other hand, many researchers consider themselves activists who are socially and politically embedded in the communities, projects, campaigns etc. they're studying (for example see Cattaneo, 2006; Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010; Demaria et al., 2013; Demmer and Hummel, 2017). Beyond that, many degrowth researchers are members of collectives that attempt to put into action the values and principles that guide their research. During the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, I joined a self-organised, remotely working collective to organise Degrowth Talks, a free webinar series that disseminated degrowth knowledge and connected activists and academics across the globe. Another endeavour is to connect degrowth with activist areas such as climate action. In April 2021, degrowth activists participated in COP26 Coalition's second Global Gathering for Climate Justice to highlight the relevance of degrowth in affluent communities for climate justice. Demmer and Hummel (2017) conclude that activist research is a "method for deliberately fostering and bringing about [...] socio-ecological (and degrowing) ways of living - in practice". Activist science is therefore both a normative framework, as well as a methodology for conducting degrowth research.

In combining thought and action, degrowth precisely attempts to avoid reproducing an expert class whose truth claims colonise and depoliticise the social sphere (economists in particular, see D’Alisa and Kallis, 2014, p. 187 and 2.4.1. Industrialisation, Technology and Autonomy). The double positionality of degrowth researchers is reflected in D’Alisa and Kallis’ (2014, pp. 186–87) call for degrowth to be conducted as Post-normal Science (PNS). PNS builds on Ellul’s critique of technology and the technological system, as well as Illich’s radical monopoly critique. Furthermore, PNS is centred on the democratisation of science through the creation of an expert community. This community would eradicate the expert monopoly from collective decision-making and include a plurality of knowledge, values and beliefs in addition to “scientific facts” (D’Alisa and Kallis, 2014, p. 187).

Gatherings such as the international degrowth conferences and summer schools bring together students, artists, academics and activists who collectively produce such diverse, pluralistic knowledge. This process co-creates new themes, research directions and topics to dedicate future research and activism to. The 2020 Vienna Degrowth Conference was dedicated to degrowth strategy. It has since motivated the publication of books, working groups and workshops beyond the duration of the conference (see for example Degrowth Vienna, 2021; Vogel et al., 2020).

Rather than just disseminating knowledge, these gatherings create the expert communities that PNS is concerned with. The re-politicisation of science operates not just at the academic or activist level, but publicly through workshops, protests, art installations. In that sense, degrowth as an activist science is an emphatic response to the dilemma of where degrowth should take place – in the academy

or on the ground. Indeed, there is no *one* place, nor the *best* place. As these paragraphs have shown, degrowth researchers and activists contribute to socioecological transformations by acting and thinking *with* social movements, citizens, feminists etc. (Walsh, 2018a, p. 20). The extent of the convergence between science and activism might vary for individual researchers, but is nonetheless a critical degrowth feature.

I have briefly sketched the relationship between activism and research within the degrowth movement, as well as its origins in the early 2000s. As an “activist-science”, degrowth combines academic rigour with social and political action. The following main section proceeds to interrogate the latter. It addresses how, and to what extent, degrowth constitutes a political movement and programme. This main section also includes a brief reflection on democracy and the role of happiness and wellbeing for the politics, and political programme, of degrowth. It is followed by two main sections dedicated to the other two axes of degrowth praxis I have identified: policy and lived experiences.

3.2. Political movement(s)

3.2.1. A Political Programme

Latouche argues that the Degrowth project must give politics new foundations, since the ‘satisfied majorities’ (from Galbraith, 1967), that is, the middle classes, have turned from solidarity to individual egoism and Western states turned to neoliberalism to dismantle the welfare state (2009, p. 30). However, Latouche has argued that the preconditions for implementing degrowth proposals in the Global North are not yet established, though degrowth “in the North is a precondition for

the success of any form of alternative in the South” (2009, pp. 58, 76). In other words, degrowth in the North frees up ecological *and* “*conceptual* space for countries [in the South] to find their own trajectories to what they define as the good life” (D’Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 5, emphasis in original). As such, a degrowth political programme would deliver opportunities to break with extraction-based development models in the South.

Degrowth is also presented as a response to authoritarian, right-wing regimes, parties and paramilitaries that have become part of the political landscapes of the US and Europe from Greece, Poland, Hungary and the United Kingdom to Germany, France, and the Netherlands (Paulson et al., 2020, p. 89). In Latin America, waves of state repression, coups and violence have swept across Venezuela, Ecuador, Brazil and other places, accompanied by roll-backs of legislation concerning indigenous rights and environmental protection as well as record numbers of murdered environmental activists (Global Witness, 2017). For degrowth, it is therefore equally important to understand authoritarianism, as it is to grasp the social undercurrents of the ecological crises of our time. As such, degrowth thinkers connect the social, political and environmental aspects of our multiple crises, in an effort to present a meaningful alternative to authoritarianism.

Degrowth advocates strive to be part of the current political (counter-)discourses to neoliberalism, privatisation and deregulation, in the UK or elsewhere. They present degrowth as a solution for those who value the common social and ecological good over private profit, greed and luxury for the few (Hickel, 2019b).

Since the mid-2010s, and especially since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, degrowth has entered mainstream debates. Advocates, and increasingly, critics, share their views online and in print for major news and digital media outlets such as the Guardian, Vice, Forbes, the Spectator etc. (Barthold, 2020; *“Economic growth is killing us,”* 2017; Hickel, 2019c, 2018a, 2018b, 2017c; Jackson and Kallis, 2019; Kaminska, 2012; Kliemann, 2014; Kothari et al., 2015; Love, 2019; McAleenan, 2020; Porter, 2015; Roulet and Bothello, 2020). Today’s degrowth proposals concern employment, finance, banking or agriculture. These are argued to (re-)establish public control over the creation of money, debt and its repayment, or food security, to name but a few issues. From a degrowth perspective, community-owned energy systems or housing cooperatives would recover the ability to both create and fulfil one’s individual or collective needs. Degrowth therefore opposes fiscal austerity as an explicit political choice in favour of frugal abundance or voluntary simplicity. Some of the policy proposals that degrowth proponents put forward are not explicit degrowth ideas, but have been championed since the 20th century.

Job guarantees and universal basic incomes have been proposed since the 1970s. The idea of a Universal Maximum Income made it into the 2017 British Labour Party manifesto as caps on public-sector salary ratios (2017, p. 47). Working hour reduction policies have been gaining political capital in Europe, New Zealand and elsewhere (Autonomy, 2020; Coote et al., 2010; Jump and Stronge, 2020; Roy, 2020). In March 2021, for example, the Spanish progressive coalition government proposed a three-year, 50 million Euro pilot programme compensating companies for the introduction of a 32-hour, 4-day working week. While the pilot programme

is not specifically geared towards reducing consumption and production, degrowth proponents argue that these policies would both decrease inequality and pressure on resource and energy use. As main section '3.3. Policy' shows, degrowth embraces existing social innovations and policies while making the case for sustainable degrowth.

Nevertheless, tensions around strategy, that is, *how* to transition towards a degrowth society, can already be found in one of its early founding documents. Latouche has argued against institutionalising a degrowth programme in the form of a political party that would trap the project within electoral games, but also because he considers the nation state level unsuitable for the establishment of a degrowth society (2009, p. 95). However, *Farewell to Growth* (2009, pp. 68–71) also suggests an “electoral [degrowth] programme”. In addition to re-localisation, working hour reduction and eco-taxes, Latouche proposes reductions in material output by cutting ‘intermediate consumption’ (packaging, transport, energy, advertising) and energy waste, “re-vitalising” permaculture and agroecology, imposing advertising penalties, encouraging friendships and neighbourliness, halting large-scale infrastructure projects such as dams, motorways, or high-speed trains, and replacing agroindustry (e.g. genetically modified crops) with ‘green’ chemistry and environmental medicine, agrobiolgy and agroecconomics.

This general programme puts into practice degrowth’s theoretical foundations, presented in the preceding chapter. Latouche stresses the movement’s need to change our imaginary to create public acceptance for such an electoral programme. To change a society’s imaginary, away from the “tyranny of

economics”, post-2010s degrowth strategy is often concerned with *interstitial and symbiotic logics of transformation*, based on the work of Erik Olin Wright (Chertkovskaya, 2020). The former requires building non-capitalist forms of exchange and grassroots economic institutions at the margins, while the latter aims to change the rules of the game – capitalism – through participation in political processes. The combination of both would have the potential to induce paradigm shifts – or change a society’s imaginary – and to mainstream alternative economic practices (Ibid). Nevertheless, whether to achieve change via reform or revolution – or the question of ruptural transformation, in the language of E.O. Wright – isn’t a decided issue within degrowth. This perhaps ultimately reflects the fact that degrowth defies both “a single definition” (D’Alisa et al., 2014a, p. xxi), as well as any “ambition to consolidate an orthodox scientific paradigm or a unified political platform” (Paulson, 2017). This ambiguity also reflects the fact that degrowth is an emerging, growing paradigm, proponents of which pride themselves on its non-dogmatic nature (D’Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 14).

Consequently, there is broad consensus on the fact that a transition can only be brought about through multiple strategies and multiple actors that change both every-day practice and state institutions (Demaria et al., 2013). These could involve actors that D’Alisa et al. (2013) have framed as either civil or uncivil, the latter of which are characterised by their refusal to be ‘governmentalized’.

Organised rebellion can happen through squats, sit-ins or land occupations or strikes (D’Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 14). Supporting community economies, cooperatives, squats, and other alternative ways of living is argued to strengthen the grassroots identities, practices and common senses that will eventually

increase support for the type of systemic reforms contained in degrowth policy proposals (Paulson et al., 2020, pp. 87–89). The Extinction Rebellion protests in April 2019 have shown that a small percentage of the population can accelerate the creation and/or strengthening of such common senses. The political impacts of the protests beyond Parliament’s declaration of a climate emergency, however, are less tangible and point to the need for, as degrowth argues, combining tacit and implicit strategies of slow, long-term transformation of social imaginaries with rapid, large-scale political and economic change.

In party political terms, European green parties do not advocate degrowth. In France, the “*Parti Pour La Décroissance*” has been active since 2011, yet remains a minority party. In the 2019 European elections, the *Décroissance 2019* list came far behind several other green candidates with 0.05% of the vote (Le Point magazine, 2019). Without major party support, degrowth electoral success seems improbable. Trade Unions may present another route into mainstream politics, yet with the exception of the marginal, anarcho-syndicalist, *Confederación General del Trabajo* in Spain, they tend to be removed from degrowth debates. D’Alisa et al. (2013) argue that degrowth has been more successful at the grassroots level of activism, despite a lack of support from big activist organisations like ATTAC, Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth. The transformative character of grassroots economics, care, food provision, housing etc. is deemed political “because they challenge and develop concrete alternatives to the dominant institutions of capitalism, and [can be] universalised” (D’Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 14).

Latouche sees degrowth as an agenda for left-wing parties. In terms of mainstream political acceptance, some find this too restrictive (Buch-Hansen, 2014). Yet on a practical level, a participant survey of the 2014 Degrowth conference showed a broad, left-wing degrowth “spectrum”, as Eversberg and Schmelzer (2018) call it. Participants shared the pacifist, feminist, and democratic principles characteristic of left-wing movements and parties. Yet, the authors also found significant divergences and conflicting views within that spectrum, ranging from eco-radical to reformist, pacifist-voluntarist, socialist-modernist and alternative practical Left (Ibid). Since their survey, the degrowth movement has gained in scope and public interest. This expansion would have been most likely accompanied by even greater divergence within the movement. The contents of a political programme and corresponding strategy questions are therefore far from settled within degrowth, and continue to be topic of academic and activist debates (Petridis et al., 2020).⁷

I conclude this subsection, therefore, with arguing that degrowth broadly draws on a common political agenda. This agenda is based on the principles of autonomy, self-sufficiency, limits to growth, conviviality and localisation, which I have identified in Chapter Two. Latouche’s electoral programme, while not universally adopted by degrowth and not detailed, nor politically feasible enough to be adopted by any political party in its entirety, laid the foundations for subsequent policy proposals. I explore these in the next main section of this chapter.

⁷ In 2021, a team of researchers are preparing a book publication titled “Degrowth and Strategy” as a follow up to the 2020 Vienna Degrowth Conference (Degrowth Vienna, 2021).

Though opinions on the details of a degrowth political programme and strategy vary within the movement, the overarching goal is to abandon economic growth as a social and political objective (Kallis et al., 2014, p. 3). Degrowth thereby became the interpretative frame for a social movement that demands to recalibrate the economy towards wellbeing and sustainability, rather than growth (Demaria et al., 2013). In terms of politics, I argue that rather than characterising degrowth as a unified political movement, it is more appropriate to speak of degrowth *in* political movement. That is to say, degrowth actors and advocates move between, and participate in, different political movements and strands of political life. The conflicting divergences within the degrowth spectrum, as well as lack of political acceptance for its ideas have so far meant that degrowth is not a unified, let alone party-political movement. Nevertheless, degrowth activists, academics, and practitioners participate in political life, at least in Europe. This can take the form of party politics, like in France, as well as supra-national, multi-stakeholder policy interventions such as the Post-Growth 2018 Conference in Brussels. Ahead of the conference, over 200 academics published an open letter across European newspapers, demanding an end to our obsession with, and dependency on, economic growth (Research & Degrowth, 2018). Degrowth is political then, with at least one single, clear policy objective, and is certainly participating in political debates.

In this subsection, I have represented my own approach to a degrowth political programme. I characterised degrowth not as a unified political movement, but as being *in political movement*. I also presented the principles and foundations of a tacit political programme. Before moving on to how degrowth translates this into

policy, the next two subsections explore degrowth's theory and practice of democracy, and the relevance of the happiness literature for its political goals.

3.2.2. Democracy

A degrowth society is argued to be more democratic than a growth-based society (Demaria et al., 2013). This would be achieved through increased exercise of localised, that is, small-scale, direct democracy to complement electoral voting and collective decision-making. Yet, the arena of direct democracy is perhaps the least tested one, especially in comparison to other socioecological transition strategies (time banks, UBI, urban gardening, public debt audits etc.). Forms of direct democracy seem to surge in times of crisis, as for example seen with the *Indignados*/Occupy movements. The *Indignados'* demands for social justice, equality, and democracy ("Real Democracy Now!") and use of innovative, deliberative democratic tactics have been well documented by themselves, social movement theorists, and activists (Botella-Ordinas, 2011; Castañeda, 2012; Glasius and Pleyers, 2013; Minguijón Pablo and Pac Salas, 2013; Romanos, 2011; Rosenmann, 2012; Taibo et al., 2011). Less well known is the fact that the movement explicitly recognised the unsustainability of the current economic system based on indefinite growth (AcampadaBCN, 2011). The Manifesto of Minimal Demands and a degrowth sub-commission explicitly linked and rejected inequality, productivism, economism, consumerism and the exploitation of natural resources (Asara, 2016). Asara's (re-)framing of the *Indignados* as a "socio-environmental movement" shows that ecology can be a pointer for direct neighbourhood politics. To contribute to this debate, I consider complementary

ways of re-conceptualising radical democracy for a degrowth transformation in Chapter Four.

3.2.3. Happiness vs. Wellbeing

Degrowth literature on happiness as a subjective wellbeing component historically draws on the “lack of association between income growth and reported subjective wellbeing [...] within countries over time” (Easterlin, cited in Sekulova, 2014, p. 114). This disconnect is argued to be caused by social comparison that fosters continuously rising material expectations, offsetting positive income growth effects. Hirsch (1976) recognised this dynamic as *social limits to growth*. Moreover, consumer satisfaction declines over time, as products yield diminishing returns while being consumed incrementally (Sekulova, 2014, p. 114). The happiness literature generally reports that in wealthy societies, production and income growth do not increase self-reported wellbeing past certain thresholds (Frey and Stutzer, 2002; Inglehart, 1996; Layard et al., 2008). Alexander (2012a) therefore concludes that becoming richer “is no longer making people happier”.

However, recent degrowth literature that involved global cross-country comparisons found the opposite – “increasing the income of all *does* increase the happiness of all”, especially when wellbeing is understood in terms of quality of life and social inclusion (Fritz and Koch, 2016). Fritz and Koch (2016) found social cohesion to be largely independent of ecological sustainability indicators, while for a small number of countries, political freedoms correlated with ‘climate friendliness’ and ‘clean production’ (Costa Rica, Panama, Benin, Ghana, India). These findings show that the twin aims of degrowth – to transition to an

ecological *and* socially equitable society – aren't mutually exclusive and can be achieved on a practical level.

Increasing income for some, however, leaves others worse off – those whose income won't increase (Reyes-García et al., 2016). To mitigate this effect, one of degrowth's core economic proposals is the democratic establishment of "fixed ratios between the minimum and maximum levels of pay" (Sekulova, 2014, p. 115). This would narrow the income gap between individuals and thereby improve *subjective* wellbeing (Sekulova, 2014, p. 115). By removing inequality, reference income standards would also decrease, offsetting the adverse social and psychological effects of social comparison (Sekulova, 2014, p. 114). For degrowth, decreasing inequality is pivotal for social cohesion, and by extension, wellbeing.

Furthermore, people report to be much more deeply and permanently affected by ruptures in non-monetary aspects of their lives, such as health or friendship than by monetary disruption (Easterlin 2003, cited in Sekulova, 2014, p. 113).

Happiness, or wellbeing, declines not only with rising inequality and social comparison, but also with lack of personal, convivial relations. Degrowth points to multiple monetary and non-monetary goods and actions to which adaptation is limited and that can therefore increase wellbeing. These include volunteering and communal exchange of goods, but also good air quality, health, high-quality social relations, as well as part-time work or work sharing, downscaling the dependence on commuting and motorised transport, reciprocity work or bans on advertising in public spaces.

These activities are argued to have the potential to moderate people's material aspirations, if not reduce the emphasis of material achievements in daily life (Andreoni and Galmarini, 2014; Boffi et al., 2014; Matthey, 2010; Natale et al., 2016; Sekulova, 2014). Natale et al. (2016) suggest making use of liberation psychology's tools of conscientisation, de-ideologisation and/or Participatory Action Research to raise critical awareness of how materialism and an obsession with economic growth negatively impact wellbeing. These tools promote adaptation-limited, non-rivalrous goods and practices, that is, goods and practices for which consumption by one does not decrease supply for another.

Beyond liberation psychology, the psychology literature consists of two traditions of happiness research. Hedonic happiness relates to 'feeling good', while eudaimonia refers to human flourishing. The latter constitutes a "non-instrumental pleasure and displeasure of a process as opposed to the consequences" (Stutzer and Frey, 2006, p. 393, cited in Boffi et al., 2014, p. 111). Eudaimonia has been strongly connected with political processes. Findings from Switzerland support Aristotle's association of wellbeing with political participation. In this case, enhanced access to political participation correlates with increased levels of reported wellbeing (Frey and Stutzer, 2002). The distinction between the two types of happiness has been criticised (Kashdan et al., 2008), not least for "serious problems in the translation of eudaimonia from philosophy to psychology" (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009, p. 209). Boffi et al. (2014, p.113) maintain, however, that degrowth

has successfully structured a eudemonic concept of well-being capable of transforming theoretical reflections in concrete institutional and political initiatives.

These initiatives are described in the non-rivalrous, adaptation-limited goods and practices referred to in the preceding paragraph. The eudemonic values of participation and the promotion of social justice and cohesion are therefore also degrowth values. Lifestyles oriented towards them would expand wellbeing, not ecological footprints. Participation in assemblies or other forms of direct democracy, for example, takes time, further slowing down productive investments and other economic activities (Kallis, 2018, p. 119). Degrowth finds support for its social, ecological and political arguments in the wellbeing literature. Chapter Seven on *Buen Vivir* in practice elucidates a similar concern with the production of collective wellbeing and affective abundance, embedded in social justice and political participation.

3.3. Policy

This chapter's third main section discusses some of the policies that if implemented, are said to have the potential to translate degrowth theory into practice. The policy programme I sketch in this main section therefore represents one way in which degrowth proponents approach socioecological transformation processes. Many of these policies, in particular Universal Basic Income, do not originate from the degrowth community. Nevertheless, degrowth embraces these policies, and advocates for them from a postgrowth context. In other words, degrowth is constructing a programme of social innovations and economic policy that in many ways already exists in a diverse range of policy circles. Degrowth advocates, however, frame them within the goal of abandoning economic growth as political and social objective.

This potential degrowth programme ranges from environmental policies and taxes to changes to major social institutions such as employment, money or technology. The overview given here is necessarily neither comprehensive, nor fully evaluative in terms of political or economic feasibility. There are other volumes that deal with practical degrowth policies in granular detail (see for example D’Alisa et al., 2014a; Cosme et al., 2017; Weiss and Cattaneo, 2017). Instead, this overview highlights the suitability of social innovation, and economic and fiscal democratisation, for addressing the multiple ecological crises. It demonstrates that the confluence of these proposals represents possible *social* and *political* alternatives to dominant technocratic, economistic and de-politicised environmental solutions of green growth and large-scale negative emissions technologies. The overview starts with Jevons’ Paradox and Resource Caps, before discussing employment and economic institutions such as debt, money, and currencies.

3.3.1. Jevons’ Paradox and Resource Caps

Arguments for green growth often rely on technological innovation, which is said to eventually decouple economic growth from carbon emissions (Jacobs, 2016, p. 200). Technology, however, is only one factor in the so-called Ehrlich equation, which describes the impact (I) of human activity on the environment as the combined causes of population (P), affluence (A) and technology (T):

$$I = PAT \text{ (Alcott, 2008; for an overview of its evolution, see Chertow, 2000).}$$

However, due to the rebound effect, topic of this subsection, any isolated changes to individual components of the equations’ right-hand side have no effect in lowering human impact on the environment – which is not to say that A, T or even

P shouldn't be lowered (Alcott, 2005, 2008). Rather, efforts need to be coordinated and combined to lower *all* components of the equation's right-hand side. In recognition of the interdependence of P, A and T, Blake Alcott (2008) reformulated the equation. He thereby turned environmental impact into a *function* of population, affluence, and technology:

$$I = f(P, A, T) \text{ (Alcott, 2008).}$$

Jevons' paradox, or the 'rebound' effect, describes these interdependencies. In 1865, William Stanley Jevons found that productivity and relative efficiency gains in resource use expand, rather than reduce, total consumption (Alcott, 2014, p. 122, 2005; Andreucci and McDonough, 2014, p. 62). Jevons, like others during this time, worried over Britain's dwindling coal supplies. His concern was compounded after observing that more efficient use of coal in railway steam engines led to more coal use, not less. As a result of Jevons' paradox, *sufficiency strategies* that target per capita consumption (depletion), as well as emissions (pollution), have so far failed to decrease material throughput (Alcott, 2014, 2010, 2008, 2005; Ekins, 1991; Gunderson and Yun, 2017; Madlener, 2010; Madlener and Alcott, 2011; Santarius, 2012). The consequence of the rebound effect when considering $I=f(P, A, T)$ is that rather than making isolated changes to the right-hand side of the equation, the rebound effect requires a coordinated, and holistic approach to reducing human impact on the environment. Given the required coordination, concepts like Global 'North' or 'South' could give way to more nuanced accounts such as "affluent communities" (Alcott, 2008). Arguments surrounding population

stabilisation remain popular within the environmental literature, and are scrutinised in subsection '4.3.3. A Question of Birth Control?'

Voluntary simplicity, convivial technologies and relational economic practices have so far been presented as key elements for a socioecological transition from a degrowth perspective. By themselves, however, they are unlikely to lower aggregate and cumulative human impact on the environment. Behavioural and technological changes therefore need to be coupled with environmental policies such as resource caps. To resolve Jevons' paradox, degrowth and more broadly, environmental policy literature suggests absolute carbon and resource caps, coupled with environmental taxes. The former would decrease bio-physical throughput without producing leakages (i.e. shifting pollution) and rebounds elsewhere (Alcott, 2014, p. 123; Daly, 1974; Kallis, 2018, p. 105; Lorek, 2014, p. 85). Caps could regulate water extraction from aquifers, for example (Alcott, *ibid*). If introduced progressively over time, they have the potential to lower absolute resource consumption, as opposed to relative efficiency gains (Lorek, 2014, p. 85). Absolute resource caps therefore avoid Jevons' paradox.

Additionally, the rebound effect is relevant for taxes on natural resources.

Eco-taxes or a Pigouvian tax would only increase technological efficiency and lower personal consumption levels if efficiency gains are removed from the economy, e.g. through more taxation or energy rations (Greene, 1992, p. 118 and Hannon, 1975, p. 101 in Alcott, 2008). Larch et al. (2018) have compared degrowth scenarios with those of national emission reduction plans and found that only the degrowth scenarios reduce leakage. The (re)distribution, however, of

resource caps and tax revenue remains a “thorny” issue (Demaria et al., 2019). Degrowth proponents argue that it would have to be negotiated democratically in accordance with the values of local autonomy and deliberation (Kallis, 2018, p. 135). Climate Assembly UK (2020), called on by six Select Committees of the House of Commons in 2019, is an example of such deliberation. Its 108 members were selected through a civic lottery process, and were broadly representative of the UK population (Ibid, pp. 36–42). The assembly issued a number of recommendations to support the UK’s net zero climate target (for details, see Climate Assembly UK, 2020, chaps. 3–11). The Climate Assembly’s participatory, if politically non-binding, process is an interesting example of Gough’s ‘citizen council’. As suggested by Demaria et al. (2019), citizen councils could define basic needs and resource caps deliberatively, democratically and equitably. The authors themselves note that degrowth leaves unresolved a definite answer to questions around democratically governing limits, as well as, I would add, the role of parliaments and central governments alongside citizen councils.

Douthwaite and the Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability (2012) suggest a ‘cap-and-share’ system. It would place an annually declining, global cap on fossil fuel CO₂ emissions. Permits would be allocated on an equal per capita basis across the globe, but below the supply of fuel (Kallis et al., 2012). Their sales would be regulated by a UN-type authority or buyer cartels that would redistribute scarcity rent, or the money producers earn above production costs once resources become scarce, to low-income families (Douthwaite, 2012). At the same time, it would increase prices for producers, who thereby maintain their income despite decreasing outputs (Ibid). While there are some issues around enforcement,

political feasibility, elite capture of benefits and the decision-making processes regarding the most socio-ecologically friendly way to spend the proceeds of the yearly permit auctions, a 'cap-and-share' system could potentially avoid leaking pollution while redistributing wealth. It provides equal access to economic resources while shifting the use of natural resources away from the logic of growth, accumulation and profit. Degrowth therefore maintains that resource caps, coupled with environmental taxes, are feasible policies that if adapted have the potential to resolve Jevons' paradox.

3.3.2. Employment

Working Time Reductions

Degrowth radically re-imagines employment. Arguments for reducing work hours, increasing work-sharing and part-time work are based on social and ecological factors. Despite post-1970s productivity gains, working hours have drastically increased for many Westerners, especially in Anglophone countries (Alexander, 2012b). Schor (2014, p. 195) remarks on both the cross-country discrepancies between average working hours per worker (Germany 1,396; UK 1,660; US 1,708), as well as the high numbers of working hours themselves. These produce vast intragenerational inequalities when coupled with the post-2008 decline in real wages. Structural bias towards full-time work and the investment of increased productivity into consumption, rather than leisure time, has come "at the cost of quality of life and planetary health" (Alexander, 2012b). In the UK, several thinktanks advocate shorter working weeks, ranging from 21-hours (Coote et al., 2010) to 32-hours (Stronge and Harper, 2019). Based on the average amount of time spent in paid and unpaid work in Britain, these are argued to create time to

increase sustainability and wellbeing (Coote et al., 2010, p. 5). Similar arguments are found in the degrowth literature (Alcott, 2013; Andreoni and Galmarini, 2014).

For OECD countries, however, there is mixed evidence about correlations between working hours, resource consumption and CO₂ emissions (Cieplinski et al., 2021; Fitzgerald et al., 2018; Knight et al., 2013; Shao and Rodríguez-Labajos, 2016; Shao and Shen, 2017). Weiss and Cattaneo (2017) point to a lack of vigorous research on effects of income, expenditure, leisure time and social interactions, as well as divergent cultural and gender factors in relation to income, education or geographical location. More free time may well result in increased consumption.

Accordingly, degrowth needs to show “how job creation can be decoupled from economic growth”, potentially using macroeconomic modelling to de-base fears of unemployment, a legitimate concern for those questioning the degrowth agenda (Weiss and Cattaneo, 2017). While more empirical studies are needed, tentative evidence shows that hourly wage increases could offset trade-offs between CO₂ emission reductions and employment (Cieplinski et al., 2021). Most importantly, this evidence shows that social innovations can, and should, supplement techno-economic solutions to the environmental crisis (Ibid). For Schor (2014, p. 197) the key challenge for degrowth is how to transform underemployment and part-time work into a desirable way of living. In the UK, growing political momentum around working time reduction policies in the public and private sectors (Autonomy, 2020; Jump and Stronge, 2020) could tacitly contribute to such cultural change.

Work sharing is another key employment policy that degrowth has embraced, as it would reduce individual working time. Job shares are argued to balance falling working hours in a shrinking economy, while avoiding unemployment and freeing up time for more low-impact, time-consuming activities (Schor, 2014). The way in which jobs are shared matters though. A working hour reduction only makes sense if output, as well as labour force and productivity decline in affluent economies. Labour force declines seem unlikely given that climate and war refugees continue to enter the labour markets of wealthy countries (Goodwin, 2014, p. 55; Schor, 2014, p. 195). Here, the degrowth perspective helps complement the shortcomings of a stand-alone working hour reduction. The dual degrowth aims of re-localisation and de-centralisation are argued to increase employment through growth in social care, de-industrialisation, arts and crafts, construction, repair and recycling, renewable energy, transport, agriculture and local administration.

Universal Basic Income, Universal Maximum Income, and Universal Basic Services

One key degrowth policy proposal is Universal Basic Income (UBI). When coupled with a Universal Maximum Income – and working hour reductions – degrowth argues that UBI has the potential to address the precarity of (un)employment. One argument that supports this claim is that the post-WWII welfare system has not abolished poverty, particularly among women in older age (as shown in the EU's 2017 Gender Equality Index, see Barbieri et al., 2017, p. C23). UBI is a *universal*, monthly salary that is *guaranteed by the state* to all citizens and *unconditional* on any labour performance (Alexander, 2014, p. 146). The degrowth vision is that a UBI should guarantee a dignified living standard, as well as access to health care, food and accommodation for those in need (Ibid). In a necessarily more labour

intensive degrowth economy, UBI is perceived to value and support work with high social values, such as care, health, environmental restoration etc. It would enable unpaid carers to receive financial compensation for their work, resulting in a more egalitarian society. UBI would also provide economic resources regardless of employment status (D’Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 13). This would not preclude those who want to work to increase their income from doing so.

Among degrowthers, recent environmental policy consensus around a Green New Deal type economic stimulus plan has produced support for the idea of *Universal Basic Services* (UBS). Financed by, for instance, eliminating existing tax breaks, UBS could provide healthcare, education, democracy and legal services, shelter, food, transport and internet. In conjunction with a UBI, this would enable all society members to live in dignity and good health (Paulson et al., 2020, pp. 69–70; SPN, 2017). The idea has also gained traction beyond degrowth. Together with the New Economics Foundation, the Policy Research in Macroeconomics (PRIME) network in the UK advocates UBS in the form of a “Social Guarantee”, which combines a living wage, UBI and UBS to “[enshrine] every person’s right to life’s essentials” (Button and Coote, 2021, p. 10). As with working time reductions, degrowth therefore tactically joins and strengthens existing conversations around UBI and UBS. A detailed discussion of the financial, social and ecological viability surrounding these proposals is beyond the scope of this chapter. They are, however, part of a potential degrowth policy package.

Job Guarantee

Some degrowth proponents have also embraced a Job Guarantee (JG) in their approach to socioecological transitions. Under such a scheme, the state, local government, community organisations or NGOs become employers of last resort, eradicating unemployment through government-backed floor prices for labour (Unti, 2014, p. 172). A JG could finance commercially unviable, yet important activities, such as care and education, urban food production, cooperatives etc., while addressing social and economic problems such as poverty, crime or drug abuse (D’Alisa et al., 2014a, pp. 12–13). A JG is interesting for degrowth because it would decouple full employment from aggregate demand and profits. People could earn a living outside the sphere of accumulation while meeting fundamental social and ecological needs (Unti, 2014, p. 174). Supporters of the JG argue that while UBI creates dependence without ensuring work, a JG offers skills, training and work experience, making *employment*, rather than income, a right (Ibid, p. 173). As such, the job guarantee could be an “open-ended policy tool [...] to complement, support or incorporate any number of other proposed measures for Degrowth” (Ibid). This subsection has presented a variety of potential changes to employment, and concludes by exploring how degrowth imagines the role of trade unions in a socioecological transition.

The role of Trade Unions

Few unions demand the decoupling of work from the domination of capitalism and the labour market, and fewer still reflect on the value of a degrowth transition

(for an exception from Catalonia, see Bayon, 2014, p. 190).⁸ Degrowth-associated deindustrialisation processes clash with most trade unions' *raison-d'être* and historical struggles. The successful union struggles between the 1950s and 1980s were founded on the commitment to full employment and an increase in the workers' share of the benefits from economic growth (Bayon, 2014, p. 189). So far, unions have not questioned the productivist and growth-based logic of the market. Indeed, some have warned that "decarbonization would require the "confiscation of petrol cars," "state rationing of meat," and "limiting families to one flight for every five years"" (Roache cited in Tooze, 2020). At best, demands focus on for example shorter work days, rather than the opposition to ecologically and humanitarian harmful practices, such as the arms, nuclear or car industry, or built-in obsolescence (Taibo, 2014, p. 39). Millions of workers suffer from exposure, unsafe working conditions and the negative effects of long working hours on wellbeing, health and relationships. Yet, it would be wrong to suggest that there is no role for unions in a degrowth society, or indeed that some unions are not the frontline of some of these struggles.

In 2017, *IG Metall*, Germany's metalworkers' union and the country's largest, successfully negotiated a 6% salary increase, a 2-year working time reduction to 28 hours per week, and additional annual leave for carers and shift workers (Redaktion IG Metall, 2017a, 2017a, 2017b). For the union, economic gains of the metal and electronics industry should be passed on to the worker. Workers, however, criticised the increasing physical and mental pressures from shift work,

⁸ CGT challenge the traditional opposition between labour and work, defining labour not just as wage relation, but collective and domestic work (Bayon, 2014, p. 190). This re-definition strongly resonates with degrowth perspectives on work and autonomy.

growing workloads and mounting levels of required flexibility (Redaktion IG Metall, 2017b). They preferred more time to recover from night shifts and to be with their families, amongst others. *IG Metall's* campaign is an example of how change can be driven by trade unions, and shows that trade unions can have an important role in democratic, socially just ecological transition.⁹

In terms of degrowth, Taibo (2014, p. 39) suggests that unions should ask questions about a) the way we work, challenging alienation and exploitation; b) for whom we work, challenging capitalism; and c) what goods we produce and what services we render, challenging the dictatorship of the present over the future (echoing Georgescu-Roegen, 1975). To that end, useful conversations might stress how contesting labour exploitation by capital would not spell the end of work (Bayon, 2014, p. 191; Taibo, 2014, p. 40). Many unions perceive degrowth as a threat to labour and work. While this is at odds with the egalitarian nature of degrowth, conversations continue about the role of trade unions in a just transition, for example at panels and plenary discussions during the 2021 ISEE-ESEE-Degrowth conference, hosted by the University of Manchester, UK.

This subsection discussed how degrowth imagines changes to employment and welfare in order to improve and guarantee living standards without increasing material throughput to the economy (D'Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 13). Degrowth thereby builds on existing policies and ideas, and reaches out to find allies in trade union struggles. The next subsection examines how degrowth imagines fiscal and monetary policy based on the principles of democracy, autonomy, and ecological

⁹ For a comprehensive study of German trade union narratives and social-ecological transformation, see Keil and Kreinin (2022).

sustainability. The following sub-section therefore discusses how degrowth approaches the core economic institutions of money, debt, and currency.

3.3.3. Economic Institutions

In addition to employment, money is argued to be another crucial social institution in need of reform. For some degrowth proponents, the establishment of citizen control over money requires a publicly owned and debt-free monetary system, as opposed to a privately issued, interest-heavy and debt-creating monetary system. The latter is a political choice, argued to put private above public interest. Proponents of debt-free, public money argue that the accompanying tax and property restructure would both redistribute wealth and challenge the socio-ecologically unsustainable growth dynamic of debt and interest (Alexander, 2011; D'Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 13). The following paragraphs briefly introduce ideas around debt-free and/or publicly owned money.

Public, debt-free money

Money as a public good

Monetary policy in its current, privatised form is largely based on Quantitative Easing. As such, it operates outside democratic control and the twin degrowth aims of social justice and ecological sustainability (McLeay et al., 2014; Mellor, 2014, p. 175; Positive Money, 2014). Therefore, money supply and debt have become central issues for degrowth advocates. They argue that for a society to be socially and ecologically sustainable, money ought to be issued debt-free and publicly owned. This would enable democratic control over state finances, while dislodging the profit and growth logic that underpins the neoliberal taxation

mechanism. Joining a long line of thinkers, from Silvio Gesell to John Maynard Keynes and Irving Fischer, Linares and Cabaña (2020) go further and suggest demurrage, that is, 'decaying free-money' whose value reduces when unused, in order to re-embed money into a socioecological (degrowth) framework. New debates about the usefulness of demurrage continue to take place in political and economic circles (Ingham et al., 2016).

The first step of reforming a monetary system would be to change the institutions that create money. For most left-wing thinkers who are supportive of degrowth, private banks would either have to be deprived of the right to create money, or would have to restrict commercial lending to meet a 100% fractional reserve requirement (D'Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 13; Douthwaite, 2012; Farley et al., 2013; Mellor, 2014, p. 176). Replacing fractional reserve banking with a full reserve system represents a point of convergence with right-wing economic ideas, from the Chicago Plan (Douglas et al., 1939) and Rothbart's anarcho-capitalism (1974) to Ron Paul (2012). Rather than establishing a free-market banking system, however, degrowth advocates for democratic debates to decide what reserves would be backed by. However, depriving commercial banks of the ability to give out loans would restrict households or individuals' spending to whatever cash or asset reserves they may have. Such spending restrictions could potentially hit lower income households disproportionately harder than well-off individuals or families, without necessarily decreasing the material and/or energy throughput of the economic system. Further interventions are therefore required to render the democratic control of debt-free money viable.

Severely restricting private or commercial money creation therefore requires some form of independent monetary or currency authority, unless the state issues money directly. These authorities are proposed to operate in a transparent, democratic manner, which is to say they need to be accountable to parliament, local governance councils or other democratic institutions. Degrowth proponents argue that the money created by either these bodies or the state could be used to directly provide public goods, for example through social investment funds, UBI, job guarantees, UBS, subsidies for co-operatives, environmental services and so on (D'Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 13; Douthwaite, 2012; Latouche, 2014a, p. 4; Mellor, 2014). This in turn would drastically decrease the need for individuals or households to take out loans in the first place, except to fund luxury items such as overseas travel or second homes. Coupled with investment into public goods and services, the public, debt-free production and democratic control of money plays a key role in how degrowth imagines a political programme to implement its principles.

Debt-free money

Changes to money supply affect public and private debt and taxation. Latouche suggests to abolish public debt through a progressive tax scheme that imposes a 100% tax on income exceeding the UMI, indirect taxes on luxury goods and services including property, as well as sanctions against the *misuse* of natural resources (2014a, p. 4). Yet, such monetary policy may only influence the supply of money, so that the allocation of public funds after taxation would have to be determined through fiscal policy. Political decisions in turn need to be guided by alternative measures to GDP, which indiscriminately tallies positive and negative

economic goods and services (Farley et al., 2013; for a review of potential degrowth indicators, see O'Neill, 2012). Some civil society groups promote a Tobin or Robin Hood tax on financial transactions. Pending more academic research into its effects (Lavička et al., 2016), such a tax has a potential role in a degrowth money and taxation scheme by redistributing wealth and disincentivising speculation (Latouche, 2009, p. 72). It has furthermore been suggested that degrowth policy would tax pollution or inequality, rather than goods and income (Farley et al., 2013; Paulson et al., 2020, p. 79). Yet, since taxes are usually concerned with allocative efficiency and price, rather than environment sustainability (Daly, 2007, p. 87), physical resource caps ought to complement these efforts (as discussed in '3.3.1. Jevons' Paradox and Resource Caps'). With regards to social 'bads', the idea of periodical debt jubilees, or cancellations, central to many ancient societies (cf. Graeber, 2012) is argued to be pivotal to any transition, albeit in some modified forms.

Due to the negative impacts of cancelling debt overnight, as seen in for example 2001 Argentina, some degrowth thinkers suggest an even distribution and restructuring of the costs of a debt jubilee, rather than debt cancellation (D'Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 13; Latouche, 2014a, p. 4). Citizen-run debt audits would decide the legitimacy of debts, which debts should be repaid, and by whom. Degrowth, along with the anti-debt movement, recognises debt as a social relation that maintains a hierarchical order (Graeber, 2012). In its modern form, it ostracises those members of society unable to pay theirs (Cutillas et al., 2014, p. 156; D'Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 13). Degrowth proposes citizen audits, or mixed government and civil society audits which may cancel debts owed to profit-lenders, declare debts

of an entire country illegitimate, as well as approve repayments to those in financial hardship (as seen in Ecuador in 2007, see Cutillas et al., 2014, p. 157; D'Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 14). Rather than wishful, utopian thinking, debt-free currencies and debt-forgiving societies a common feature of our past (Douthwaite, 2012; Graeber, 2012, pp. 65, 81–87). A debt-free society would require a change in social attitudes, institutions and norms, feasible with or without degrowth.

Furthermore, degrowth argues that the introduction of debt-free, public money ought to be accompanied by comprehensive changes to property rights, energy supply and perhaps even by putting a state monopoly on natural resources (Kallis et al., 2012; Loehr, 2012; van Griethuysen, 2012). Moreover, the proposed changes would take place at the institutional level. Money would not be created by politicians, but democratically controlled institutions which may allow national, regional and local currencies to co-exist, reducing systemic dependencies and debt spirals while re-establishing public control over public resources (e.g. money).

Alternatively, an independent banking system represents equally strong practical arguments for localising the economy, socially and ecologically. An independent, local bank could restrict, if not reject external investment that is unwanted by the local community (Douthwaite, 2004). Democratically restricting capital flows of an area would remove its community and economy from the logic of profit and growth and have the potential to focus on local eco-social investments. Local banks and credit unions already exist and support a wide range of community investment projects.

These proposals are consistent with degrowth ideas of economic and democratic re-localising, presented in the preceding chapter. Establishing democratic control over the supply of money and debt demonstrates how a degrowth transition would not only be ecologically more sustainable, but necessarily more democratic (Demaria et al., 2013). Finally, it is worth reiterating that these proposals are not exclusive to degrowth. They can be found in grassroots organisations, practices and direct action and have been proposed by ordinary citizens, academics and activists who lobby for a fair and democratic monetary system. The subsection on Economic Institutions concludes by briefly discussing democratic alternatives to state-issued money, popular with degrowth proponents.

Alternative Currencies

Complementary currencies to state-issued legal tender have existed for much longer than degrowth. While many complementary currencies have spread through the green, small is beautiful movements of the 1960s and 1970s, their origins can be found in the monetary innovations put forward by 19th century socialist utopians like Owen and Proudhon (Dittmer, 2014, pp. 150–151). Richard Douthwaite's *Short Circuit* (1996) presents a detailed overview of practical, fiscal alternatives to global money circuits. The growth critic and degrowth advocate insists that establishing "a local money system is absolutely fundamental to greater economic self-reliance" (Douthwaite, 1996, p. 60), and that local currencies would allow internal, that is, neighbourly, local or regional transactions to be carried out independently of the external money flow. Complementary currencies operate alongside the mainstream monetary system, and aim to address its shortcomings by, for example, strengthening and diversifying local

economies (New Economics Foundation, 2015, p. 33). Their potential for democratic management makes them attractive and preferable to unaccountable large-scale Quantitative Easing (Dittmer, 2014, p. 150). Cryptocurrencies are a recent, digital addition to peer-to-peer forms of exchange.

Initially, bitcoin in particular has been heralded as a new form of decentralised, egalitarian social system (Wood and Buchanan, 2015). Cryptocurrencies generally were considered as potential pathways towards economic decentralisation through bypassing banks or economic sanctions (Firth, 2017; Jacobson, 2018). So far, however, they haven't found many real-world uses beyond venture capital investment. From a degrowth perspective, cryptocurrencies remain problematic because of their large environmental costs. In March 2021, estimates for bitcoin's annual energy consumption ranged from 89 to 130 TWh (Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance, 2021; Digiconomist, 2021).¹⁰ Grassroots feminist, ecological and community economy projects across the world, however, enact local agendas that are sympathetic to degrowth by using the underlying decentralised and distributed blockchain technology that supports most cryptocurrencies (for examples see Howson, 2021). Cryptocurrencies and blockchain are a developing degrowth research topic and practice, in particular when coupled with policies such as UBI.

In addition to complementary currencies and cryptocurrencies, community currencies (CCs) "are a subset of complementary currencies that are tied to a specific, demarcated and limited community", either geographically (local

¹⁰ For comparison, the UK consumed 325 TWh of electricity in 2019 (National Statistics, 2020, p. 77).

currencies), business-based (mutual-credit schemes), or online (digital currencies; New Economics Foundation, 2015, p. 33). CCs include regional and local currencies, Local Exchange Trading Systems or Schemes (LETS), timebanks, barter networks and digital credit systems. Of those, degrowth authors have explored the former four.

Regional currencies

Douthwaite (2012) explores the role of regional currencies in a degrowth scenario. Regional energy bonds could act as purchasing vehicle for energy from a certain power plant, but also as regional currency to buy and sell goods in the knowledge that the currency will be backed up by real energy production (Kallis et al., 2012). Hornborg (2017) suggests complementary currencies more generally, possibly in the form of a universal income. Alongside the national currency, the complementary UBI currency could be used within specific geographic boundaries, providing “tangible and attractive incentives for people to live and consume more sustainably” (Ibid). These types of exchange would ultimately avoid third party involvement of the state or its creditors, whose loan repayment conditions are fiscal austerity, that is, public service cuts (Latouche, 2014a, p. 4). However, such a scheme would also have to avoid creating a hierarchical two-tier money system (as seen in Cuba’s dual currency system, for example, from 1993 to 2020). Regional currencies nevertheless form an attractive monetary practice from a degrowth point of view. Local Exchange Trading Systems are another monetary alternative that has attracted degrowth interest.

Local Exchange Trading Systems or Schemes (LETS)

For Dittmer (2013) LETS are “membership clubs using a virtual currency created at the moment of transaction as a credit for the seller [and] debit for the buyer”. In contrast to other community currencies, they are mutual credit systems for individual, rather than business use (New Economics Foundation, 2015, p. 35).

LETS contribute to a more localised economy through increasing the local spending power of your neighbour, rather than far away, anonymous others (Linton, in Douthwaite, 1996, p. 65). Furthermore, its supply cannot be artificially in- or deflated. Instead, all LETS accounts in credit will equal the amount of those in debit, thus encouraging interest-free debt that can be cancelled by buying another member’s goods or services (Ibid). In contrast to national currency, LETS may not be used to gain power over other those without it, since as a local currency, “no-one is ever desperate to get it: they can simply make their own” (Douthwaite, 1996, p. 65). LETS have existed in different sizes and life stages all over the world (for examples, see Douthwaite, 1996, chap. Three). They meet the needs of their participants because users determine what kinds of service they offer through a software or online system, and negotiate prices without central brokers (Douthwaite, 1996, p. 34; New Economics Foundation, 2015, p. 35). As such, LETS are intuitively useful for degrowth.

Dittmer (2013) discusses the potential benefits and limitations of LETS from a degrowth perspective, given that LETS as alternative monetary practice are not endemic to the degrowth community. They are interesting for degrowth, however, because of their embedded principles of autonomy, democracy, and localisation.

Benefits of LETS include self-reported increases in friendship and self-help

networks. They are, however, also limited by their restricted geographic exposure, niche existence within young, liberal circles, lack of accessibility for unemployed, disabled or elderly people, and lack of government guidance on the relationship between LETS and welfare payments (Dittmer, 2013; Williams et al., 2001).

Furthermore, LETS do not necessarily challenge the logic of economic growth (Dittmer, 2014, p. 150). The same might be said about convertible local currencies (CLCs) such as the Brixton Pound.

Convertible local currencies (CLCs)

In contrast to LETS, CLCs are backed by national currency or other legal tender, for which it can be exchanged (Dittmer, 2013). As such, CLCs do not specifically strengthen local purchasing power. However, unlike most LETS, they allow businesses to participate (Ibid). The Brixton Pound, for example, is accepted by around 150 independent shops and traders in Brixton, and has encouraged local spending, trade, and community connections (Miller, 2020; New Economics Foundation, 2015, p. 41). In 2021, the Brixton Pound is undergoing updates using blockchain technology, further highlighting the relevance of decentralised technology for community economies (Brixton Pound, 2021). However, due to being pegged to the value of their backing currency, CLCs are not freely available to those with no or less money (Dittmer, 2013). Therefore, Dittmer (213) argues that they are less likely to facilitate non-market exchanges or encourage alternative livelihoods. The *Chiemgauer*, a Bavarian CLC with over 600 business members, however, seems to owe its success to the backing of local banks and credit unions, amongst others (Ibid). This points to interdependencies between

alternative currencies and independent banks, as discussed above, for degrowth's aims of economic and political localisation.

Timebanks

In addition to regional and local currencies and LETS, Timebanks appear to be among the most interesting complementary currency systems for degrowth. Rather than aiming to strengthen purchasing power or otherwise complement national currency, time banks offer to store value in types of non-monetary exchange such as community activities or helping neighbours (Joutsenvirta, 2016; Seyfang, 2006). A timebank is a reciprocal volunteering scheme, in which a central broker coordinates activities, often via an online platform (Seyfang, 2004). As the name suggests, it trades in time. Members earn credits by donating their time to another member, and in return may claim the time of another (Laamanen et al., 2015). Most importantly, and in contrast to capitalist social relations, "everyone's time, work and needs are of equal worth" (Peltokoski et al., 2015). It thereby foregoes the typical failings of the mainstream economy which disincentives or punishes care, volunteering, raising children etc. through developing social capital and community cohesion (Seyfang, 2004).

Time is a metric currency. There is no need to control its supply, as there can be no shortages, nor a need for borrowing, lending, or interest. As such, timebanks forego the need for an issuing authority (CES, n.d.). Timebanks are convivial tools because they place value on social relations. Members decide how to spend their own time. By placing this particular type of service-credit system outside market relations, timebanks are thought of "as a significant way of creating new

institutions of wealth, value and work” that “advance many features of a degrowth society” (Joutsenvirta, 2016). Timebanks allow people to become “active citizens and co-producers, rather than passive consumers” in a radically democratic way (Ibid). They chime with arguments presented in the preceding chapter by Illich, Ellul, Gorz, as well as Latouche.

The complementary currencies (CCs) presented here are considered convivial degrowth tools because of their potential to foster community-building, alternative values and livelihoods, and local production and consumption (Dittmer, 2013). Dittmer (2013), however, found LETS, time banks, and convertible local currencies to be weak tools for advertising purposive degrowth:

LETS can facilitate informal resale, repair, and sharing of commercially produced goods, but their burdensome management and confinement to small memberships, dictated by their reliance on informal social pressure, limit their usefulness in this regard. [...] Time banks help people expand their social networks, and are better than LETS at reaching the socially excluded. However, they are confined to unskilled personal services, bureaucratic, and dependent on grant funding. [...] Convertible local currencies (CLCs) are best at attracting local businesses, but no significant evidence of their said capacity to localize supply chains has surfaced as yet, and their business-friendly design works to the detriment of other criteria.

His criticism of “behind-society’s-back variety of LETS” and “the appeal-to-elites variety of time banks” (Dittmer, 2013) echoes others degrowth views. D’Alisa et al. contend that state issued money would remain the

most important locus of intervention in a degrowth transition: first, because taxes, a large part of total circulation, are paid in it; and second, because community currencies cannot satisfy the requirements for inter-communal and international trade, which is inevitable in complex economies such as ours (2014a, p. 13).

Degrowthers contend nevertheless that CCs remain an important supplement in times of crises to ensure continued access to vital services (Ibid). While they might

not be the preferred currency for degrowth, time banks or regional currencies represent important relational practices. First, they shift production for exchange to production for use, de-commodify and de-professionalise work, as well as introduce logics of reciprocity and gifts (D'Alisa et al., 2014a). Second, they build on everyone's needs and capacities while limiting individual freedom to "access to the tools of the community" only with regards to other people's freedom (Illich, 1973, p. 11). Third, they foster convivial practices as well as autonomous and creative relationships between politically interrelated people, e.g. through drastically diminishing the role of managers (Illich, 1973, p. xii; p. 11; Samerski, 2016). Finally, they diminish the role of wage labour and private property and focus on the new forms of commons argued to be essential for degrowth transitions (D'Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 11).

To illuminate how degrowth might look like in practice, this main section has scrutinised the policies advocated by degrowth. While those policies do not originate from the degrowth community, they nevertheless have been embraced by it. I showed that a potential degrowth policy programme would rely on resource caps to resolve Jevons' Paradox, as well as eco-taxes, working time reductions, public, debt-free money supply and complementary currencies. This programme is neither exhaustive, nor fully agreed on by all degrowth advocates. I intended for this main section to demonstrate how degrowth imagines a socioecological transition. It does so by building on existing policy ideas and networks, while framing its proposals within degrowth principles of democracy, autonomy, and localisation. At the beginning of this chapter, I identified 'policy' as the second aspect of degrowth in practice. The first aspect discussed degrowth in

political movement. The last main section before this chapter's conclusion therefore discusses the third strand of degrowth in practice – lived experiences.

3.4. Lived Experiences

This chapter's fourth main section briefly shows how degrowth in practice is constituted by grassroots, bottom-up economic and non-economic practices. The degrowth literature borrows Chris Carlsson's term 'nowtopias' to describe projects that implement degrowth principles and values. Nowtopias are processes that (re-)generate territories, relations and subjectivities through non-wage labour and the production of alternative futures in the present (Demaria et al., 2019). From urban gardening and eco-community residents, to bike repair shops and environmental activism of the elderly, nowtopians "champion direct action, conviviality and living well" (Gearey and Ravenscroft, 2019). Through putting into action degrowth ideals, they are argued to prefigure a degrowth society. Nowtopias necessarily operate alongside, outside, and/or within mainstream culture. Not every nowtopia is also a degrowth project. The following subsections explore some lived experiences that to varying extents implement degrowth in terms of energy, infrastructure and agriculture.

3.4.1. Energy

The preceding main section, '3.3. Policy', dealt with core degrowth policy proposals around employment. This sub-section highlights the implications of the relationship between labour as imagined under degrowth, and energy. It argues that energy democracy is a central feature of a degrowth transformation towards less carbon intensive energy infrastructures.

Working time reductions or a Job Guarantee aim to address unemployment and increasing working hours in a shrinking economy, as well as the environmental, health and social impacts of long working hours. More importantly, these proposals suggest shifting hours from paid work to more fulfilling, voluntary work or self-employment. Kallis (2013) argues that such shift would challenge the distinction between paid and unpaid (reproductive) work. “Work” towards communal wellbeing may be unpaid but does not necessarily constitute leisure time. Nevertheless, there are some ecological economists who contend that “(i)n a future scarce of energy we will have to work more not less” (Şorman, 2014, p. 43).

This position arises from the argument that in a post-carbon society, lower quality energy sources require the diversion of more, not less energy, labour and technical capital into energy production itself (Andreucci and McDonough, 2014, p. 62; Klitgaard and Krall, 2012; Şorman, 2014; Sorman and Giampietro, 2013). The belief that a degrowth society is likely to turn into “a far more labor-intensive and physically demanding economy” (Andreucci and McDonough, 2014, p. 62) rests on calculations that juxtapose hours of human labour with oil, gas or electric motors for energy production. Given the large, labour intensive service and care sectors in the Global North, more working hours would be required to sustain the current social metabolism (Şorman, 2014, p. 43). These arguments contradict the work-sharing arguments presented above and point to some ambiguity within degrowth.

Kallis (2013) maintains that reducing working hours in a degrowth scenario characterised by climate change and energy limits isn't obvious or even given. Therefore, degrowth proposes a change in social functions that "will permit less work even if we have less energy in the future" (Ibid). He adds that increased leisure, care and reproductive time would facilitate a value shift towards downscaling paid work. As highlighted previously, redistributive policies form a crucial part of any energy-scarce, but perhaps labour-intensive degrowth future. As Shove and Walker (2014) urge social theorists to acknowledge, "energy demand is embedded in social practice". Post-fossil energy demand will inevitably be affected by changes in our work, leisure time and care patterns. As mentioned previously, more leisure time might result in more consumption.

These changes are reflected in degrowth approaches to energy democracy, a central feature of how degrowth envisions energy production. Energy democracy, advocated by trade unions and the co-operative movement, amongst others, challenges corporate control over natural resources (Alarcón Ferrari and Chartier, 2017). In terms of advancing alternatives, Metze (2017) proposes to make use of "controversies over natural resources, such as shale gas, as opportunities to further [...] ambitions" of downscaling economic throughput through for example community-owned renewable energy schemes in countries like the Netherlands.

Kunze and Becker's study (2015) of four European, decentralised and community-owned renewable energy production schemes found that collective ownership and political motivation were positively correlated with a reduction in energy and material throughput (Kunze and Becker, 2015). While questions remain

about cooperative energy projects' ability to drive behavioural change, their impact on financial and social equity and distributive justice supplies degrowth scholarship with favourable arguments for decentralised renewable energy supply (Holstenkamp and Kahla, 2016; Kunze and Becker, 2015; Rommel et al., 2016).

While the number of renewable energy initiatives has increased across Europe over the last years, Kunze and Becker (2015) naturally caution that this advance does not imply the emergence of degrowth societies.

For degrowth, co-operative ownership structures and community owned energy schemes are two examples of how energy democracy could look like in practice. Though questions of scale, motivation or regional divides remain, energy democracy based on renewable resources is considered a founding pillar of a degrowth transition. The next subsection considers some infrastructure aspects, before concluding the lived experiences of degrowth in practice with a brief discussion of agriculture and food security.

3.4.2. Spatial Planning, Housing & Transport

Living arrangements, the built environment and transport systems affect energy and resource demand. Degrowth therefore investigates the use of urban and semi-urban spaces. In metropolitan regions geared towards tourism and commerce, planners are argued to have deliberately designed out conviviality from urban spaces, as for example seen in the removal of fountains or benches (LeBlanc, 2017). Commercial zones in which high rents require businesses to attract outside consumers further squeeze public, convivial space (LeBlanc, 2017; Wächter, 2013). Exemplary of cities around the world, Bologna "suffered in a

number of different ways under [...] urban management that privileged the growth of profits for powerful economic actors over the daily life of ordinary people” (LeBlanc, 2017). Yet, “conviviality in community comes about when residents are empowered to make places their own” (Ricci, cited in LeBlanc, 2017). LeBlanc (2017) therefore argues that neighbourly acts and use of space for film screenings or picnic tables are instances of conviviality that in their smallness are political acts in and of themselves.

While useful for fostering non-market relations, isolated acts of neighbourliness will not herald large-scale socioecological transition. The construction industry has vast CO₂ footprints, given that cement production is the third-largest source of anthropogenic CO₂ emissions (Andrew, 2018). Against this backdrop, the 2019 Oslo Architecture Triennale titled “Enough: The Architecture of Degrowth” explored architecture in “an economy based on nourishing culture and nature rather than [GDP]” (Harper, 2019). In attempting to orientate urban design towards ostensibly unproductive activities, that is, redistribution, reuse and maintenance, “(t)he architecture of degrowth proposes cities of shared plenty — of nourishing culture and prioritising the production of art” (Harper, 2019; see also Smith and Harper, 2019). Complementing the design and construction process, Wächter (2013) examines the role of spatial planning institutions which regulate land use, as well as the structure and design of landscapes.

Institutional change in regional spatial planning towards socio-ecological sustainability would prioritise renewable energy and energy efficiency, contain urban sprawl and mono-functional settlement structures, as well as provide

community services such as child and social care, “dog-walking, car pools, bike repair shops, food cooperatives or community gardening” (Wächter, 2013; Domènech et al., 2013b; Xue, 2015). Xue (2014) in turn warns of the “local trap” of participatory planning, and argues that spatial decentralization and local self-containment in low-density and scattered urban or eco-villages would increase the ecological footprint of built-up land, while also potentially leading to an increase in road traffic for trade, travel or cultural activities. In addition to economic and political relocalisation, Xue (2014) calls for self-sufficient, dense cities that rely on surrounding farmland. Spatial planning that works towards degrowth is therefore considered feasible in urban as well as rural contexts.

An example of conviviality in practice at the intersection of urban and rural space can be found in Barcelona’s ‘rurban’ squats, such as the Kan Pasqual, Can Piella and Can Masdeu projects. Located in the countryside closely surrounding Barcelona, these are motivated by horizontal self-organisation and the pursuit of autonomy (D’Alisa et al., 2013). Communal living removed from the transactional logic of the market requires time and space, which means that most squats and other centres of do-it-yourself labour and ‘primary production’ can be found in rural or semi-rural areas (Ibid). Precisely because of their dedication to autonomy, non-hierarchical modes of organisation and collective economic systems, Cattaneo and Gavaldà (2010) consider the squats in the Barcelona hills of Collserola as “practical implementations towards Degrowth”. Inhabitants practice forms of direct or deliberative democracy, dedicate themselves to permaculture, collectively manage their commons and make use of renewable energy. Cattaneo and Gavaldà (2010) therefore argue that they are firmly embedded in their

socio-ecological environment (Ibid). Although some argue such marginal subsistence is only enabled by wasteful industrial society, these living nowtopias point to the fact that both physical and political power can be arranged evenly (Ibid). The squats use less energy than the average Spanish household, and their potential for driving social change leads Cattaneo and Gavalda (2010) to conclude that small-scale, self-organised societies are inherently characterised by a closer connection between democracy and ecological sustainability. Life satisfaction, economic security and wellbeing are central to how degrowth imagines the use of urban, rural or 'rurban' spaces and associated housing and transport arrangements.

3.4.3. Agriculture and Food Security

Food production and security are important topics and within degrowth, are often framed within an Ellulian critique of technology. The proponents of non-hierarchical modes of production, economic de-industrialisation and landscape de-urbanisation tend to reject the use of agrochemicals and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in favour of organic agriculture and/or agroecology (Boillat et al., 2012; Flipo and Schneider, 2014; Gomiero, 2017; Infante Amate and González de Molina, 2013; Kallis et al., 2014; Taibo, 2014, p. 13). Cuba's post-Soviet Special Period has received attention as "as a real-life experience of degrowth" – albeit an undemocratic and involuntary one – which reduced the country's ecological footprint while improving the population's health (Boillat et al., 2012; Borowy, 2013; Franco et al., 2013). Despite admitting to recent reversals of these achievements, as well as the Cuban state's dependency on food imports, Boillat et al. (2012) conclude that judging from the Cuban experience, "small-scale

farmer cooperatives have the best potential for achieving the degrowth-oriented goals of agroecology” (see also Bloemmen et al., 2015). Other empirical studies focus on urban gardening as a way to localise food production and increase wellbeing.

Urban gardening, also practiced in Havana during the Special Period, the economic crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, is a convivial food production activity that has attracted degrowth’s attention. In Can Masdeu and elsewhere, urban gardening blurs the distinction between production and consumption while promoting neighbourly relationships (Anguelovski, 2014a). *Terra Preta*, the anthropogenic black soil made by peoples across the world, is increasingly being advocated by degrowth activists as vital ingredient in any urban, community, or balcony gardening (degrowth.info, n.d.). The degrowth focus on organic, non-GM food production, however, has been criticised as naïve and romantic (Bartkowski, 2017a; Gomiero, 2017). Gomiero (2017) uses the example of Germany to demonstrate that lack of arable land in proportion to population size renders food self-sufficiency nearly impossible. He furthermore cautions that organic fertiliser requires livestock rearing, which would further reduce arable land available for crop production.

In contrast, Bartkowski (2017a) argues for a more flexible degrowth approach to biotechnology and GMO. He sees the latter’s potential for use in organic agriculture, given increases in GMO development by public research institutions. Furthermore, recent public research innovation around CRISPR/Cas genome editing allows for its broad application in cisgenic crop-breeding, that is, using

genes from crossable species, rather than different ones (Bartkowski, 2017b; van Hove and Gillund, 2017). A cisgenic GM potato resistant to late blight, “the most devastating potato disease worldwide”, has been edited with resistance genes from wild potato species originating in South and Central America, but cannot be planted in the EU due to GMO regulations (van Hove and Gillund, 2017). The complex ethical, economic and political questions surrounding GMO and its potential usefulness in reducing land, resource or pesticide use thus remain a contested issue within degrowth and elsewhere.

The degrowth principles of autonomy, localisation, and conviviality, however, can be found in the ways in which degrowth thinks about the role of food and agriculture within and towards socioecological transition processes. Urban gardening, ‘rural squats’, and community owned energy schemes or co-operatives are some of the ‘nowtopias’ that put degrowth principles and values into practice. They conclude this subsection and third aspect of degrowth in practice. This paragraph is preceded by this chapter’s conclusion, which brings together the three pillars of degrowth practice I identified at the beginning of this chapter – political movement, policy, and lived experiences – under the banner of non-reformist reforms.

3.5. ‘Non-reformist reforms’ – a preliminary conclusion

Chapter Two laid out the theoretical foundations of a strand of thought I call “degrowth *scientifique*”. This chapter, Chapter Three, framed degrowth as a post-normal science and politically in movement, led by activist research. As such, it examined how degrowth might look like in practice. I conceptualised practice as

consisting of political movement(s), policy, and lived experiences. Their confluence produces a tacit, multi-level political project centred on direct democracy, social wellbeing and equality, and ecological sustainability.

First, I analysed the contents and ambiguities of a possible degrowth electoral programme, before introducing degrowth's ecological arguments in favour of direct democracy. I argued that degrowth as a social movement is politically in movement because of its divergent nature and participation in different political processes. Degrowth as a social movement is part of the political arena in Europe, yet not a unified political movement. In terms of social limits to growth, the chapter's second main section '3.2. Political movement(s)' also highlighted the positive relationship between political participation and eudemonic wellbeing.

Second, I reviewed key socioecological transition policies that form a degrowth point of view would catalyse a socioecological transition towards an economy that operates within human and ecological boundaries. Absolute resource caps, coupled with redistributive mechanisms and eco-taxes would be the chief instruments for reducing material throughput and avoiding rebound effects.

Degrowth radically re-imagines employment, with key policies evolving around working time reductions, Universal Basic Income, Universal Maximum Income, Universal Basic Services and job guarantees. Fiscal degrowth proposals relate to the democratic and localised management of currencies and banks, as well as the creation and supply of money. Notably, the majority of these policies aren't endemic degrowth policies, so to speak. In other words, degrowth embraces

existing policy proposals and ideas, and advocates them from a degrowth standpoint.

Third, a variety of ‘nowtopias’ prefigure degrowth in practice, such as community-owned renewable energy schemes, ‘rural’ squats, or urban gardening. These initiatives implement degrowth principles, and demonstrate that degrowth ideas, whether ex- or implicitly, appeal to those who seek alternatives to socially and ecologically harmful economic systems.

Chapter Three also examined the strategy question pertinent to degrowth as in political movement. Muraca and Petridis attempt to overcome this through Gorz’s concept of ‘non-reformist reforms’. These are

incompatible with the preservation of the system and *‘are not conceived in terms of what is possible within the framework of a given system, but in view of what should be made possible in terms of human needs and demands* (Gorz, cited in Muraca, 2013; see also Petridis, 2016; and Petridis and Zografos, 2015).

Since *reformist* reforms, like humanitarian aid, do not challenge “existing power structures, accumulation dynamics and political processes” (Petridis, 2016), they can be absorbed by the system (Lucita, 2002). Their objectives must necessarily be subordinated to the rationality and practicality of the dominant system (Gorz, 1967, in Muraca, 2013).

‘Non-reformist reforms’ in turn identify and contest structural contradiction and domination. As such, and in contrast to reformist reforms, they are incompatible with the preservation of the dominant system because they *modify* structural power relations (Gorz, 1967, p. 7, in Muraca, 2013). Non-reformist reforms are a form of political strategy that while drawing on existing representational

frameworks could set a more radical trajectory for future change (Fraser, 2003, p. 80, in Muraca, 2013). In doing so, they empower social movements and improve life within the system *now*, while expanding the potential of future self-governance structures (Bond, 2008, and Wright, 2013, p. 20, in Petridis, 2016). Non-reformist reforms solve the state-social actor dilemma through giving a role to the former “to create space for the transformative subject to emerge” (Petridis, 2016).

An example of a non-reformist reform is the non-monetary time-tax credit scheme offered by *Stadin Aikapankki*. This Helsinki time bank was threatened with taxation by the Finnish tax authorities. Rather than cooperating with the state, *Stadin Aikapankki* offered to pay tax in the form of time credits. Though the fiscal authorities rejected their offer, time credit tax payments would have introduced a radical new way of thinking about value, money and taxation outside the market economy.

Following Petridis (2016), most of the policies and lived experiences discussed in this chapter can be deemed ‘non-reformist reforms’ because they are a result of bottom-up social practice and therefore have “a place in the current, *but also* in the desired society” (emphasis in original). They cover basic needs while simultaneously bringing us closer to the emancipatory vision of degrowth through expanding non-market economic interactions (Ibid). Petridis (2016) mentions some of the key degrowth policies discussed in this chapter, such as reduced working time, UMI and UBI, and direct democracy as prime examples of non-reformist reforms. As such, they could very well form part of an electoral

programme that challenges austerity, privatisation and widening inequalities while at the same time changing the public's imaginary away from the "tyranny of economic growth". They could also, however, become co-opted by state or supra-national actors (as has been done arguably with the European Green Deal; see Mastini in Degrowth Talks, 2020a). The policy direction of the relational and convivial economic practices discussed here, and their impact as 'non-reformist reforms' on a degrowth transition remains to be seen.

To conclude, this chapter has demonstrated that degrowth has a comprehensive set of policy proposals with tentative real-world corollaries and examples of implementation at local level. Life on the planet Anarres in Le Guin's ambiguous utopia, *The Dispossessed* (1975), strikingly resembles some of the most libertarian proposals and arguably represents a fictional degrowth society, naturally full of human weaknesses and strengths. The proceeding chapter, Chapter 4: Degrowth in Conversation, reflects on some of the gaps in the degrowth literature. In it, I identify three areas of research that would overcome degrowth's Eurocentric and overly economic aspects.

Chapter 4: Degrowth in Conversation

The previous chapter contextualised ‘degrowth practice’ through its political movement(s), policy proposals and lived experiences. In it, I showed that degrowth is a viable political project and broad social movement.

Degrowth-friendly policies and economic institutions include resource caps, working time reductions, UBI and UBS, debt-free money and alternative currencies. Chapter Three illustrated a variety of *social* solutions to climate change that can, but don’t have to be flown under the banner of degrowth. However, both preceding chapters - the genealogy of degrowth *scientifique* and constructive literature review of practical degrowth political and economic proposals – were also characterised by certain analytical absences. First, the particular strand of degrowth presented in Chapter Two – degrowth *scientifique* – is defined by little substantial focus on non-European affluent *and* low-impact societies and communities outside the ‘West’. This contrasts with the broader degrowth “tent” that analyses and centres environmental justice from postcolonial and decolonial, as well as feminist and anti-racist perspectives (Paulson, 2021). Second, and leading on from that, there are very few explicit gender perspectives beyond care work in the strand of degrowth presented there. Third, the contradictions within what I have called the ‘degrowth political programme’ have been solved tentatively through the concept of non-reformist reforms. These however don’t provide enough detail on how to implement degrowth democratically, nor how to deal with contemporary threats posed by authoritarian currents. In this chapter, I develop three points of intervention that put degrowth into fruitful conversation

with other approaches and pick up on some of the work that is undertaken as part of the flourishing degrowth pluriverse (Ibid). These areas are decolonisation, feminism, and democracy.

In Chapter Four, I therefore aim to further develop degrowth scholarship by suggesting three promising areas of research: to provincialise, depatriarchalise and democratise degrowth. While this chapter doesn't purport to achieve those aims within its confines, I aim to give impetus to further areas of research and empirical studies, as well as provide linkages with social action and thought from the Global South, especially Latin America. These types of inter-epistemic dialogues are essential for addressing the *civilisational crisis*, and designing transitions that overcome modernity's multiple crises, including patriarchy. The chapter thereby also prepares the arguments for Part II, that is, the development of a decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth.

4.1. Provincialising Degrowth

One of degrowth's core principles is that degrowth in the North is a condition for the flourishing of alternatives to development in the South (Latouche, 2007b, pp. 90–94; Ridoux, 2006, pp. 13–15). Latouche approached degrowth from African socialist, (neo-)liberal, and popular development critiques (Latouche, 2009, pp. 56–57). Yet, critics often perceive degrowth as a threat to economic growth and human development in the Global South. Some degrowthers, however, have argued that degrowth in the North frees up ecological space, so that the South can grow some economic sectors (Kerschner, 2010). Reducing material consumption in the Global North can directly improve living conditions for people in the South, for

example with regards to conflict minerals, toxic waste, land grabs, deforestation etc. (Ridoux, 2006, pp. 13–15; Taibo, 2014, p. 30). Yet, while degrowth was originally conceptualised for its application in the Global North, the South’s megacities suffer from similar problems to those that gave birth to degrowth initiatives (air pollution, congestion, long commutes and working hours, urban sprawl, destruction of natural habitats etc.; see Taibo, 2014, p. 31). Escobar (2015) maintains that the degrowth in the North/growth in the South scenario isn’t just flawed because of the inadequacy of the North-South binary, but also because it disregards decades of criticism of development-as-growth, articulated from within the Global South by both state and non-state actors (for examples see Guerrero, 2019). The post-development critique posits poverty and underdevelopment as outcomes of economic growth and development, and as such won’t be solved with more of the same (Demaria et al., 2019). Some degrowth authors therefore suggest focussing less on *who* should or shouldn’t grow, but ask

how growth produces poverty, how people challenge on the ground destructive and extractive processes of growth, and what tentative alternatives do they create along the way (Demaria et al., 2019).

They thereby recognise the colonial relations that growth-oriented policies produce and that these are embedded in unequal exchange, extraction of human labour and cheap raw materials (Ibid). This type of insight has only very recently, from 2018 onwards, been acknowledged in the Anglophone degrowth literature. These reflections depart from earlier, more Eurocentric understandings of degrowth and were a result of many discussions during degrowth summer schools, conferences and other activist exchanges (especially the 2018 Degrowth

Conference in Mexico; Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019; Perkins, 2017; Schmelzer, 2017), as well as collaborations between Jason Hickel and Giorgos Kallis (2019) and papers by Hickel (2019a) and Rodríguez-Labajos (2019). In 2020, efforts were made to introduce degrowth to a Latin American audience, both through Spanish-language webinars with Latin American thinkers (Degrowth Talks, 2020b) and the 2020 Latin American Degrowth Forum, convened by the Chilean *Centro de Análisis Socioambiental*.

The forum explored the challenges for degrowth in Latin America, in particular for activists and social movements. Participants perceive the current multiple crises to be of *civilisational* dimension, that is, a result of ways of living, being and knowing that are based on hierarchies and separations (man-woman, society-nature, nation-Other, scientific-traditional knowledge). To better navigate the civilisational crisis, they suggest learning from the worldviews of the “original peoples of our [Latin American] territories” within a “dialogue of Knowledge(s)” (Arahuetés et al., 2021). This includes economies and practices of care, including towards non-human nature. For the participants, degrowth could be part of a non-technocratic development approach that challenges the inclusion of Latin American society in the homogenous, dominant development model, without displacing existing (professional and traditional) knowledges. These efforts, led by activists from the Global South, point to the opportunities offered by engagement with relational epistemologies, situated expert knowledge and social movements from the South.

Additionally, participants of the Latin American Degrowth Forum identified food security and production as central themes (Arahuetés et al., 2021). If the territories covered by soybean monocultures in Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina etc. were to be converted for domestic food production or re-forested, European (and North American and Chinese) importer of soy would have to source other animal feed input. As discussed in subsection '3.4.3. Agriculture and Food Security', the lack of available, arable land in Western Europe poses significant challenges to localised economies and food security. For indigenous peoples and the ecological movements in Latin America, however, recovering extractive territories would be a first step towards addressing the multiple crises provoked by industrial extractivism (see Svampa, 2019). The collective learnings from the Forum foreshadow the critique of degrowth's Euro- and anthropocentric focus, laid out in detail in the following subsections. They also confirm this research's pertinence to North-South conversations. In this sense, the Forum's trajectory gives an insight into the challenges for degrowth in the Global South.

The Latin American Degrowth Forum has shown what efforts led by Global South scholars and activists look like. What do efforts led by activists and scholars from the Global North look like? The following subsections substantiate that since the late 2010s, there have been a great variety of attempts made by degrowth scholarship to address its Eurocentric focus. To 'provincialise' degrowth means to acknowledge its cultural specificity (Chakrabarty, 2000) and intellectual rootedness in modern, anthropocentric categories of analysis. The next three subsections address degrowth's engagement with environmental justice,

ontological pluralism, and the epistemological and ontological challenges posed by the Anthropocene.

4.1.1. Environmental Justice and Ecological Debt

Before the late 2010s, studies about environmental justice (EJ) and degrowth tended to originate in the Spanish-speaking world. While environmentalism is seen as a white, middle class concern, protagonists of EJ movements tend to be racialised/migrant/indigenous/working class communities that suffer from (often historical) effects of poor housing, toxic land and water, land grabs, displacement etc. (Anguelovski, 2014b, p. 34; Gilmore, 2013; Ruffin, 2007, p. 35). To illustrate, only few English-speaking degrowth papers reference the ecological debt towards the Global South. One estimate puts the costs of climate change induced loss and damage for developing countries at \$428 billion per year by 2030 (Stamp Out Poverty, 2018). Historic responsibilities of industrialised countries for these damages pose particular challenges for degrowth. How will a socio-ecologically just transition in the global North address the continued effects of historical greenhouse gas emissions, while tackling inequality within industrialised societies?

Debates around energy, technology and degrowth examine North-South inequities, for instance with regards to the energy/labour nexus (Huber, 2021) or the role of colonial, racialised and gendered exploitation in early capitalist technological development (Paulson, 2021; see also Gómez-Baggethun, 2020a). I argue for the continuation and concretisation of these debates, for example with regards to lithium batteries and their disposal. PV plants, wind turbines and tidal wave energy may all contribute to a democratic, localised energy system, but the

questions of rare earth metal mining and the environmentally friendly storage of energy remain unaddressed. For whom will decentralised, community-owned renewable energy schemes in Germany have created meaningful livelihoods?

In response, Mosangini (2012) introduces the concept of “debt of growth” which denotes the Global North and the South’s elites as debtors, and the countries of the Global South as creditors of growth. This debt is not just ecological, but social, historical and economic. While repayment may come in the form of degrowth in the North, social, environmental, economic, cultural etc. responsibilities will continue to arise (Anguelovski, 2014b; Mosangini, 2010; Taibo, 2014, p. 36).

Environmental justice is becoming a central element of degrowth. As such, attempts are being made to resituate degrowth within the “post-development convergence” (Demaria and Kothari, 2017; Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019). These arguments position degrowth as *one of many* pathways, in alliance with indigenous or ecofeminist resurgences that are characterised by revaluation and restoration of knowledges and communities of care. The attempt is to move away from an individualised, rationalised and quantified approach to degrowth, epitomised in the concept of “voluntary simplicity”, and instead embed it in the web of life, “interspecies communal living” or “materially rooted political ontologies and territorial political ontologies” (Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019). The second part of this thesis puts forward a decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth, based on these type of ontologies.

A variety of alternative proposals attempt to overcome the inappropriate North/South distinction for degrowth. Llistar (2010) argues for dividing the world’s

population into those who contaminate and those who fall ill, those who benefit or lose and so forth. Such a division would advocate degrowth to those whose consumption levels contribute to planetary ecological overshoot, regardless of geographic origin (Llistar, 2010; Taibo, 2014, p. 188). Other approaches advocate distinguishing environmental responsibility according to income (Marques et al., 2012). Xue et al. (2012) argue for extending degrowth to the rich regions of China, rather than the country's "least developed populations". A more nuanced distinction between beneficiaries and victims of economic growth (or lack thereof) is of particular importance to discussions of EJ (Anguelovski, 2014b). Like others, Mosangini demands redistributive and obligatory cooperation on behalf of the North, while suggesting food sovereignty, eco-feminism, post-development and Buen Vivir as possible routes for the South (González Pazos et al., 2014; Kothari et al., 2014; Mosangini, 2012, 2012, 2011; Thomson, 2011).

Furthermore, the racial politics of degrowth are complicated, where they exist. Few analyses integrate race in socioecological transition designs. Doing so, however, would complement international, North/South justice concerns with intra-national, North/North justice. Gilmore (2013) highlights the difficult position of Black Americans:

(C)an the US and its citizens become a credible participant towards a sustainable future without first addressing this historical inequality [of slavery and racial discrimination]?

In addition to ecological reparations, degrowth models could therefore include reparations for the economic, cultural, social and political effects of racialisation, slavery and colonisation. In terms of challenging liberal economic categories, DeVore (2017) examines social, rather than private, property claims to trees and

springs by squatters in Brazil. Similarly, analyses of the economy of *khat* in Madagascar (Gezon, 2017), the economy of permanence based on Gandhian principles (Corazza and Victus, 2014), of *Ubuntu* (Ramose, 2014), the Peruvian Colca Valley, the Maldives (Hirsch, 2017), *Buen Vivir* (Gudynas, 2014a) or environmental justice movements in Chiapas (Otto, 2017) in relation to degrowth point to diversifying research connections with regards to degrowth and the Global South. To illustrate, the terms ‘decolonisation’ and ‘decolonial’ can now easily be found in publications relating to degrowth (Dengler and Seebacher, 2019; Deschner and Hurst, 2018; Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019; Varvarousis, 2019). However, one important element that has received less attention within degrowth – and which this thesis seeks to address – is the ontological critique of modernity and capitalism that is contained in many EJ movements.

4.1.2. Provincialising Nature – An Ontological Critique of Degrowth

EJ movements often respond to resource distribution conflicts. Additionally, however, EJ struggles also concern “ways of knowing, being and valuing (i.e. epistemology, ontology, and value regimes)”, and thereby often contest the erasure of alternative ways of being and living that aren’t based on a divide between nature and culture (Singh, 2019). According to Singh (2019) “degrowth movements are often not expressed (or perceived)” in terms of ontological struggle. As such, a systematic ontological critique of degrowth has yet to be developed. The following main and subsections, as well as Part II of this thesis address this gap. Making a connection between *Buen Vivir* (BV) and degrowth is particularly powerful, as BV challenges the productivism and developmentalism imposed by the Global North, and ensuing extractivist policies (Taibo, 2014, p. 31).

This is a common feature of both degrowth and BV, but not of the progressive Latin American Left, which includes the so-called pink tide governments of Rafael Correa, Evo Morales etc. In contrast to degrowth, however, BV presents a challenge to the nature/culture binary prevalent in modern social science and policy. As such, Part II's BV case study serves to articulate an ontological critique of degrowth and conclude the thesis with a decolonial framework for degrowth.

The trajectory of the understanding and construction of 'nature' in the natural and social sciences – from environmental determinism or materialism, ecosystem ecology and the Gaia hypothesis in the natural sciences, to political, deep or feminist ecology in the latter – rarely questions the nature/culture dichotomy that underlies scientific research (Latour, 1993). Chapter Two traced the way in which economics in particular treats the natural "environment" as external to human behaviour and by extension, the economy. Nature appears as capital in production functions or resource in input-output analyses, that is, as a sub-system to the economy and not vice versa (cf. 'Fig. 2.1 Ecological Economics resituates the economy as a sub-system of ecosystems'). As a discipline, (neoclassical) economics both constitutes and illustrates the coloniality of nature, or its subordination (as natural resources) to the interests of the economy and its consequent exploitation by human activity (Escobar, 2015). I argue that within degrowth, there is room for more reflexivity about how the construction of nature as separate from humans affects not just (economic) science, but politics.

On an epistemological level, degrowth thereby risks misrepresenting a particular, local mode of thinking as universal phenomenon (Sundberg, 2014). This is a

characteristic of colonial forms of knowledge production. In representing the Western understanding of nature as scientific, that is, universally valid, degrowth closes avenues of engagement with non-Western forms of knowledge production. Rather than replicating the colonial discourse of associating indigenous peoples with a closer proximity to nature, this thesis aims to decolonise degrowth by, amongst other aims, “provincialising nature” (Coletta and Raftopoulos, 2016). This requires de-centring the mechanistic, materialist epistemology and ontology with which degrowth approaches science and environmental politics (Radcliffe, 2016, pp. 161–162). To start, we must therefore historicise, that is, put into intellectual context, the ontology of degrowth, as well as acknowledge how it is reflected in degrowth policy. In Latin America for example, failure to do so has perpetuated the link between indigenous politics and environmental policies to date (Ibid).

From the late 2010s onwards, ontological enquiries into degrowth politics and activism have questioned degrowth’s structuralist, anthropocentric discourses on the environment (Brown, 2018; Demmer and Hummel, 2017; Paulson, 2014, p. 46). The ontological critique of degrowth delivered by these enquiries focussed on the *political* and *cultural* growth critiques of degrowth. Chapter Five therefore delivers a detailed ontological rebuttal to the *ecological* analysis of growth delivered by **the *scientifique* strand of** degrowth. In it, I interrogate the mechanistic, materialist ontology behind the latter, and present a genealogy of the idea of ‘nature’ from a decolonial perspective. Before doing so, however, the proceeding subsection presents arguments for breaking with degrowth’s anthropocentrism based on the philosophical challenges of the Anthropocene. It is followed by a discussion of two more areas for research that I recommend in this

chapter: depatriarchalising and democratising degrowth. Chapter Four's first main section, '4.1. Provincialising Degrowth', concludes by considering whether degrowth can be non-anthropocentric.

4.1.3. Non-anthropocentric Degrowth

The supposedly modern separation between nature and culture, and between the natural and social sciences has come sharply into focus in the recent "ground-breaking attempt to think together Earth process, life, human enterprise and time into a totalising framework" (Hamilton et al., 2015, p. 2). The 'Anthropocene' has been recognised as a new, formal epoch of the Geologic Time Scale (Anthropocene Working Group, 2019). It refers to the *global* impact of human activity on the "Earth's surface, atmosphere, and hydrosphere" (Finney and Edwards, 2016). Human impact today equals that of a *geological* force (Steffen et al., 2007). The term has received extensive coverage across the social and natural sciences, as well as popular literature (Editorial, 2011; Finney and Edwards, 2016; Monastersky, 2015). The following paragraphs briefly set out the main characteristics of this new era. This first main section concludes with a brief consideration of some epistemological implications, especially with regards to the nature/culture dualism prevalent in the sciences and popular imagination.

*Nosotros somos la tierra*¹¹

The Anthropocene's founding scientists think of humans as a *telluric* force, having brought about changes to the entire system of the Earth (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000). These changes occur in the Earth's stratigraphic record, or its "deep

¹¹ 'We are the Earth'. In this context, I use the phrase to subvert the meaning of human impact on earth systems, given that the phrase is also used by indigenous groups from the Amazon to refer to their relationship with nature (!*Nosotros somos la Tierra!*, 2019).

history”, measured in intervals that are longer than the records we have of the past 10,000 years of human history (Chakrabarty, 2009; Finney and Edwards, 2016; Walker et al., 2015; Zalasiewicz et al., 2010). The Anthropocene also describes “the cumulative impact of civilisation” (Syvitski, 2012) in the form of landscape transformation, urbanisation, species extinction, resource extraction and waste dumping. Together, these have caused global warming, but also ocean acidification, soil erosion, rising sea levels etc. (Hamilton et al., 2015, p. 2). Human-induced changes are considered to continue to impact the planet’s bio-, geo- and atmosphere for the next hundreds of thousands of years. Despite the relatively short atmospheric lifetime of CO₂ (50-200 years), the extent and longevity of its impact on climate depends on transient uptakes by terrestrial and marine biospheres (Archer et al., 2009). As such, there has been no scientific agreement on the long-term lifetime of fossil CO₂ (Ibid). Anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions nevertheless have been estimated to potentially suppress the earth’s glacial cycle for the next 500,000 years (Archer, 2009 in Hamilton et al., 2015, p. 3). Recognising these extraordinary systemic changes, the term “environmental crisis” has been replaced by the ‘Anthropocene’. This new, formal geological epoch succeeds the post-glacial Holocene epoch of the last 10,000 to 12,000 years.

These global shifts are unprecedented in our 2.5 million years long hominid history. Considerable disagreement surrounds the start date of this epoch. Lewis and Maslin (2015; Maslin and Lewis, 2015; see also Davis and Todd, 2017; and Koch et al., 2019) single out 1610 and 1964. These dates demarcate the annexation of the Americas and consequent depopulation that led to increased

carbon uptake through subsequent reforestation. It also includes the transatlantic trade, colonialism and transoceanic species movements that laid the material foundations for the Industrial Revolution. The 1964 boundary refers to the bomb spike signalling the peak in radionuclide fallout from nuclear weapons testing after the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963. Other papers refute these dates (Zalasiewicz et al., 2015a), show evidence in support of the latter (Neukom et al., 2014) or consider mutually non-exclusive events such as the megafauna extinction 50,000 – 10,000 years before present, the beginning of farming 11,000 years BC, widespread farming, the beginning of rice production, the Industrial Revolution, use of persistent industrial chemicals since the 1950s, or the first nuclear weapons detonations from 1945 as potential start dates for the Anthropocene (Fischer-Kowalski et al., 2014; Lewis and Maslin, 2015; Ruddiman, 2013; Waters et al., 2014; Zalasiewicz et al., 2015b).

The post-1945 “Great Acceleration” allows for a more nuanced understanding of the global implications of human exceptionalism (Will Steffen et al., 2015). It refers to the dramatic changes in magnitude and rate of human impact, registered across socioeconomic and biophysical spheres (Ibid). Socioeconomic indicators measure long-term, post-industrial increases in population, real GDP, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), urban population, primary energy use, fertiliser consumption, large dams, water use, etc. Biophysical indicators – carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, stratospheric ozone, surface temperature, ocean acidification, marine fish capture, shrimp aquaculture etc. – have tracked changes to the Earth system’s structure and functioning. The measurement spike of these indicators after the 1950s is said to prove that the six decades of the “Great Acceleration” ought to be

considered unique in human (“deep”) history (Steffen et al., 2004, p. 336; Steffen et al., 2015a). However, global aggregates hide issues of inequity. OECD consumption patterns, for example, strongly dominate the world economy, while population growth took place mainly outside the OECD (Steffen et al., 2015a).

Given unequal resource use and consumption between OECD countries and the rest of the world, the “species” narrative of the Anthropocene has been questioned. Amongst others, Haraway (2015) and Malm and Hornborg (2014) emphasise the intra- and inter-species inequalities that are embedded in the ecological crisis. Any analysis must therefore recognise the role of socio-technical trajectories and political-economic dynamics. “Humans” aren’t just biological agents, but the product of complex belief-systems embedded in social orders that contain power asymmetries and produce global inequalities (Bonneuil, 2015, p. 21). The profound inequality embodied in the “near-complete human appropriation of the biosphere” (Chakrabarty, 2015, p. 52) has been noted by natural and social scientists alike (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016, p. 250; Raupach et al., 2007; Will Steffen et al., 2015). This inter-disciplinary consensus hints at the profound insight of Chakrabarty (2009), who pronounced the “collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history”.

Arguably, this distinction stems from five hundred years of scientific and socioeconomic development, which transformed plural, organistic worldviews into a single, mechanistic one (Allan, 2018; Merchant, 2020). The Anthropocene invites us to think further about the arguments that I have made in this thesis so far. Namely, that social and natural science, culture and society, the human and non-human world form a whole, rather than separate entities. In economic terms,

that requires the recognition of the economic system as subordinate to the earth system. In political terms, these arguments compel us to think about nature in non-utilitarian ways, which might include the award of rights and agency to the living world. In theoretical terms, these arguments oblige us to formulate new, relational political ontologies grounded in humankind's embeddedness within nature.

Degrowth's Anthropocene

For degrowth, the recognition of a new, anthropogenic geological epoch has been welcomed. Some consider that the declaration of the Anthropocene even validates degrowth's main arguments. A special issue of *Sustainability* defined degrowth as *the* economic alternative for the Anthropocene (Kosoy, 2013).

Latouche argues that both mainstream and Marxist economics are blind to the catastrophic effects of human activity in the Anthropocene, using the new epoch as a springboard for his arguments (2013). "Exiting the economy" by decolonising our imaginary and constructing a degrowth society of "frugal abundance" are for him imperative to sustaining our children's quality of life, and indeed, their survival (Castoriadis, 2010, cited in Latouche, 2014b, 2013). Some argue that while the Anthropocene's roots lie in the combination of high energy resources and capitalist expansion, degrowth – whether by design or disaster – will eventually turn the Anthropocene into "a short-lived episode of human history" (Reichel, 2015). Others have explored the role of visual aesthetics and phenomenological philosophy in creating an Anthropocenic degrowth scenario (Heikkurinen, 2019; Popplow and Dobler, 2015). Chertkovskaya and Paulsson (2016) suggest the term *growthocene*, as an extension of *capitalocene* and in opposition to 'Anthropocene'.

Finally, Semal (2015, p. 94) argues that while limits to growth have been *anticipated* over the last 150 years, the Anthropocene heralds the beginning of the *realisation* of these limits.

Yet, degrowth engagement with the Anthropocene continues to be *anthropocentric*. Degrowth writings can struggle to integrate knowledge produced by those who perceive the ontological separation of nature/culture as an inherent product of the global imposition of the European model of knowing and being via colonialism, racism and cultural domination. Engaging in serious analyses of ontological and epistemological pluralisms, as I do in Part II of this thesis, might increase the applicability, viability and attractiveness of degrowth outside the minority world. The following pages present arguments in favour of planetary agency, which are at the forefront of more radical ways of thinking about a non-anthropocentric, non-hierarchical present and future. As such, these arguments can play a central role in a reconfigured normative, ontological and epistemological framework for degrowth.

Planetary Agency

Latour and Chakrabarty argue that the *Earth* has obtained agency. Concurrently, the omnipresence of human imprint and the politics of tackling the multiple long-term biophysical trends of the Anthropocene have subverted scientific objectivity (Chakrabarty, 2009; Latour, 2014). Contrary to domination-reproducing, “nature is dead”/post-nature approaches to the Anthropocene that present human forces “overwhelming” natural ones (Purdy, 2015; Steffen et al., 2007), Chakrabarty reminds us of the anthropogenic perspective of the Anthropocene.

Since the planet will eventually clean up its carbon cycles over millions of years, humans are not the sole agents of earth system processes and evolutionary history (Chakrabarty, 2015, p. 54).¹² Confining climate change to a problem caused by capitalism alone furthermore obfuscates the responsibility of human agency as a species and geological force older than capitalism itself, since climate change is a result of greenhouse gas quantities, rather than solely capitalist, or indeed socialist, economic development (Bonneuil, 2015, p. 28). Chakrabarty argues for *species thinking* that connects human history to the history of life on our planet as a way to move beyond anthropocentric, and ultimately reductive, readings of the Anthropocene as a crisis of capitalism (2009). He also notes the paradox of these developments in the biophysical and socioeconomic realms, since capitalism and the “Great Acceleration” have also brought about female emancipation through technological innovation (washing machine, refrigerators etc.) and development (smart phones, microfinance etc.; Chakrabarty, 2015, p. 52). And, it is only thanks to the poor, in other words, thanks to *uneven development*, that current fossil fuel combustion does not produce even more GHG emissions (Bonneuil, *Ibid*).

Considering the planet to have agency contradicts the mainstream Anthropocene discourse of humans as the new geological force, albeit in subtle ways. It nevertheless nudges disciplines to work together. According to Hamilton et al. (2015, p. 7), interdisciplinarity is the Anthropocene’s fundamental challenge, “for it is a crisis of many dimensions” (Chakrabarty, 2009). Moreover, propelled by ideas of human exceptionalism in the Abrahamic transcendental religions, human

¹² Murray Bookchin would add, however, that humans are the sole *ethical* agents (2005, p. 37)

agency itself has to be reconsidered over “multiple and incommensurable scales at once” (Chakrabarty, 2015, p. 52, 2012). Understanding humans as a geological force, Chakrabarty argues, amounts to a non-ontological form of collective existence, stretching “our capacity for interpretive understanding” of what it is to be human beyond the object/subject producing dichotomy of nature and culture (2012). This thesis argues for the transcendence of disciplinary boundaries, e.g. the “‘humans-only’ orientation of the social sciences and humanities” (Hamilton, 2017). The Anthropocene challenges us to do so, including degrowth advocates.

Any discourse that aims to provide solutions for a Anthropocene world will thus need to conceive politics as “the progressive composition of the common world” (Latour, 2004, p. 18) in which humans inhabit both ontological and nonontological modes of existence (Chakrabarty, 2012). The latter can be understood as an absence of both hierarchy as well as the dualist distinction between nature/human and self/other, which implies a fundamental shift away from perceiving the world through supposed modern categories (Latour, 1993). In contrast, the discipline of economics has ruthlessly exploited that very division, which fostered “nature’s” appropriation and domination by “culture” (Latouche, 2013). In a perfectly dialectic process, its ignorance of ecological limits has now resulted in the revision of this division, culminating in the idea of planetary agency. Of course, perceiving humans as “one” with the natural world has been an important part of popular counterculture since the 1960s and long before that.

“Non-ontological modes of existences” are by no means a new concept either when considering anthropological history, for example. Ancient and contemporary egalitarian societies unconditionally share key resources and exert social control

over dominance attempts (Dyble et al., 2015; Erdal, 2014, pp. 212–213). Equally, and perhaps most importantly, these contemporary political and social theories do not reflect on the fact that this “new” conception of planetary agency and non-ontological modes of existences is not very new at all. In fact, indigenous authors have criticised thinkers for appropriating indigenous thought, then repackaging and selling it for the European academy without suitable credit (Cameron et al., 2014; Hunt, 2014; Todd, 2016; Watts, 2013). To avoid doing so, Part II of this thesis interrogates how indigenous and non-indigenous social and environmental movements in Ecuador put “non-ontological modes of existence” into practice.

This subsection, ‘4.1.3. Non-anthropocentric Degrowth’, has shown that radiocarbon dating, molecules and glacial cycles influence political economy, sociology and political science. It drives home the point made by Chakrabarty and Latour and indigenous thinkers before them: that the modern division between science and politics, social and natural history is ill-equipped to deal with the Anthropocene’s extraordinary earth system changes occurring (Latour, in Hamilton et al., 2015, p. 146; Todd, 2016). Perhaps “social scientists must become geophysicists” (Hamilton et al., 2015, p. 35), if we are to successfully explore the human condition that is now co-determined by drastically changing earth system processes. The Anthropocene represents a huge epistemological, if not existential challenge to modernity (Hamilton, 2015, p. 33). The convergence of human and geological history therefore represents a useful tool for challenging those aspects of degrowth that have not yet broken with the epistemology and ontology of modernity and its anthropocentric assumptions around agency. Chapter Five

substantiates arguments for attributing agency to nature, and present Rights of Nature as political instruments capable of legally enshrining it. Before doing so, however, the next main section addresses the second of the three research recommendations laid out in the present chapter: depatriarchalising degrowth.

4.2. Depatriarchalising Degrowth

Feminist scholars have called for a more sex and class based analysis of the gendered social reproduction that is embedded in the capitalist order, but also in many degrowth proposals (Bauhardt, 2014; Picchio, 2014, pp. 209–210). The following subsections presents some feminist critiques of degrowth and degrowth approaches to feminism. It argues for systematically depatriarchalising degrowth by analysing the gendered effects of its policy proposals and recognising the racialisation of women in addition to class and sex-based discrimination. The main section concludes with a short discussion of the population question in environmentalism and degrowth.

4.2.1. A Feminist Critique of Capitalism

To date, feminist thought has delivered some of the most comprehensive and damning critiques of the capitalist (and neo-liberal) economic system. It has shown that market economics renders unpaid (care) work done by women invisible, limiting the conceptualisation of the productive process to salaried work. This is despite the fact that the economic system as measured in GDP would collapse without the domestic work, and social and biological reproduction performed by women (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003; Picchio in Taibo, 2014, p. 26). The stark and unequal juxtaposition of salaried production time by

“productive men” with biological reproduction, that is, non-salaried time assigned to women exposes the hierarchies, conflicts and forms of dominance embedded in the capitalist market economy (D’Alisa et al., 2014b, p. 63; Picchio, 2003). As such, degrowth is built on an economics of care and aims to overcome this juxtaposition. Before analysing these ideas, the following pages give a necessarily brief overview of some feminist critiques of capitalism outside of degrowth.

Feminist thinkers like Silvia Federici have demonstrated how capital accumulation has depended on the free labour, production and re-production of women since the early phases of post-feudal capitalism, and later, colonialism (Federici, 2004). From the 20th century onwards, the pension system and welfare state have been argued to perpetuate the sub-standardisation of women’s health, welfare and income (for a brief overview of feminist debates on the welfare state, see Misra and Akins, 1998). In the 21st century, the EU’s 2017 Gender Equality Index (Barbieri et al., 2017, p. C23) demonstrates that women’s unpaid, part-time or low-paid work leads to lower wages than men and poverty during retirement.

Reproductive work sustains not just the economy by producing wealth for capital, but human life itself through domestic work, and above all, the birthing and rearing of children. Yet, this work continues to be de- and under-valued by the economy (Taibo, 2014, p. 26). “The economy of care”, that is, unpaid work, has become symbolic of the unfair distribution of domestic work across gender and class. The Italian 1970s feminist movement “Wages for housework” tried to challenge the devaluation, de-politicisation and feminisation of the domestic economy through highlighting the “patriarchy of the wage”, or dependence on

men (Carlin and Federici, 2014). By refusing free domestic labour, “precisely the female role that capital has invented [for women]”, its value would be made visible. A more revolutionary aim was to change social relations between men and women to emancipate the latter from capital’s control over their bodies in the form of forced (domestic) labour (Federici, 1975). The economy of care is today said to be worth more than all paid work performed in the market place (Picchio, 2003 in D’Alisa et al., 2014b, p. 63). As this section has shown, care work, while reproducing life, impoverishes women.

For eco-feminists, the ‘women-nature-nexus’ connects violence against women with the exploitation of nature and the Global South (Bauhardt, 2014; Mellor, 1997; Mies and Shiva, 2014; Plumwood, 2006, p. 55; Shiva in Taibo, 2014, p. 29). Feminist economics, in contrast, sees women as autonomous subjects.

Consequently, women are “not definable on the basis of the male norm that has transformed sexual difference into a social inferiority” (Picchio, 2014, p. 208). The following sub-section will analyse how degrowth as a field of study and social movement has incorporated these feminist critiques and economics into its analyses.

4.2.2. Degrowth Feminism vs. Feminist Degrowth

Despite degrowth’s focus on care, more work needs to be done to incorporate feminist economics into degrowth. Feminist thought has delivered a similar critique towards degrowth as neoclassical economics. Materialist eco-feminists have focused on reproductive labour, bringing to the fore women, peasant, and indigenous perspectives. They argued for more local, decentralised economies

based on sufficiency/subsistence, minimal energy and material throughput, and bottom-up politics long before degrowth did so (Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999; Salleh, 2009, 2008). This illustrates one of the arguments I am making in this thesis. Namely, that degrowth suffers from a certain degree of ahistoricism not only with regards to colonialism, but in relation to the very social theories and movements it draws on, consciously or otherwise. These include (materialist) ecofeminism and socialist feminism, as well as Marxist, anarchist or utopian traditions of thought from the 18th century onwards. Lynne Segal (2018) gave a broad overview of those traditions in her keynote at the 6th International Degrowth Conference, precisely to highlight their intellectual absence from degrowth. As such, degrowth has to contend with the charge of appropriating female academic labour (Salleh, 2018), a problematic attribute certainly not exclusive to degrowth, but which would nonetheless locate the discourse within broader patriarchal traditions. Moreover, ecofeminist works are largely informed by activism and collaboration with indigenous, peasant or otherwise marginalised women and communities. This is in stark contrast to degrowth, which while purporting to be a critique of economics, tend to focus on economic modelling of (degrowth) scenarios, at least during the early and mid-2010s. Proponents call for more quantitative analyses (see Weiss and Cattaneo, 2017), rather than more qualitative work with those who are already living local and culturally specific versions of degrowth (Salleh, 2012).

Picchio (2014, pp. 209–210) argues that degrowth is not broadly applicable to feminist macroeconomic analysis. This is because of its overbearing focus on production and consumption, to the detriment of a more sex and class based

analysis of the gendered social reproduction embedded in the capitalist order (see also Bauhardt, 2014). Furthermore, D'Alisa et al. (2014b, p. 64) contend that

(i)n their commitment to fight productivity – the obsession of modernity – degrowthers [fail to account] for the continuous re-emergence of reproductive activities.

Bauhardt (2014) makes it clear that degrowth has

failed to identify the gender hierarchy as an economic structure that is foundational for the capitalist production mode, nor do they mention gender equity -including the need for the revaluation of women's care labor and increased awareness of the social and economic significance of care work - as an explicit aim in their reorganization of the growth economy.

Degrowth is an emancipatory project that seeks to create opportunities for autonomy. The call for depatriarchalising degrowth is therefore a call to actively seek liberation for those parts of the population, who historically have been most marginalised and under-valued within capitalism. Consequently, degrowth must relocate the experience of the body and people at the centre of politics and society, as called for by D'Alisa et al. (2014b, p. 65). Re-centring society around care would make a degrowth transition possible in the first place. Apart from gender equality, it would recognise caring's profound importance for wellbeing of oneself, one's family, neighbourhood, and society. An economy of care would also decrease environmental burdens by re-routing time away from consumption and production of material objects.

Feminist critics welcome degrowth's emphasis on care. They argue, however, that degrowth ought to recognise its own gendered nature by providing, for example, detailed assessments of the gender implications of its proposed economic changes (Bauhardt, 2014). Bauhardt (2014) highlights that these must include analyses of domestic care performers – women – are affected by, amongst others, gendered

consumption decisions and compulsions, local food production and subsequent changes in cooking habits, or the impact of fewer cars on public transport (Ibid). The *Caring Economy*, as opposed to the economy of care, conceptualises (re-)productivity to include both natural and social reproduction processes in the economy, in an effort to overcome the hierarchical separation between economic, salaried production on the one hand, and socioecological production processes on the other (Bauhardt, 2014; Biesecker and Hofmeister, 2010; Wichterich, 2014). Feminist studies of degrowth (Bauhardt, 2014; Wichterich, 2013) argue that any post-growth society must integrate paid and unpaid care work as equitable elements, to ensure that society is re-oriented towards wellbeing for all.

Given the explosive growth of the degrowth literature since the late 2010s, the absence of feminist analyses is particularly striking. Two *Science Direct* searches in 2017 and March 2021 brought up only two theoretical articles each that explicitly explore feminism and degrowth (Bauhardt, 2014; D'Alisa and Cattaneo, 2013; Dengler and Seebacher, 2019; Mehta and Harcourt, 2021). More practical essays on feminism and degrowth originate from degrowth conferences (Conse Carpintero et al., 2010; Perkins, 2010; Wichterich, 2014). The activist strand of degrowth, that is, degrowth as a movement, has thought about, acted on, and organised around feminism from the start.

Conse Carpintero et al. (2010) delivered a brief, but radical feminist manifesto at the 2nd International Degrowth conference, calling for a more critical engagement with science and technology vis-à-vis gender and degrowth, particularly with regards to the hyper-medication before and during childbirth, psychological

and/or medical interventions towards transsexual or intersexual people, and the influence of pharmaceuticals and consequent medicalisation of problems that arise from systemic failures. They call for degrowth to question the “culturally binomials man/nature, man/woman, or the absurd relationship man-culture/woman –nature, and to get rid of them completely” (Ibid). These discussions would radically restructure the understanding of gender within degrowth. Similarly wanting to re-shape and *critically gender* degrowth discourse, Mosangini (2011) urges researchers and activists not to ask what feminism can do for degrowth, but instead focus on what degrowth can do for feminism. Feminist authors have furthermore criticised degrowth for exclusively focussing on inter-human relations, rather than calling for an equilibrium between all forms of life in a post-growth society (Pérez Prieto and Domínguez-Serrano, 2014; Taibo, 2014).

The 4th International Degrowth conference in 2014 was characterised by an absence of big NGOs, trade union representatives or other traditional “left” resistance groups. Instead, a multitude of mostly young grassroots actors, small initiatives and alternative projects put forward a feminist examination involving care, commons and sufficiency based economy without prescribing a one size fits all approach (Wichterich, 2014). At the 5th International Degrowth conference, a roundtable on feminism(s) and degrowth led to the launch of the Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance (FaDA) network in 2017. Since then, FaDA has become a global network for activists, scholars, and practitioners of degrowth who work towards “fostering dialogue between feminists and degrowth proponents and [...] integrating gender analysis [...] into degrowth activism and scholarship” (FaDA, 2020a). Members come together during conferences but also conduct important

work outside these formal spaces. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, FaDA produced a public statement clarifying the difference between the pandemic's economic downturn and intentional feminist degrowth, as well as arguing for a Care Income, for example, in the context of a "Care-Full Radical Transformation" spurred on by the pandemic (FaDA, 2020b). Finally, insisting that "there are a thousand alternatives", feminist degrowth is one of the few areas in which the linkages between development and alternatives to development such as *Buen Vivir* have been made (Pérez Prieto and Domínguez-Serrano, 2014; Wichterich, 2013).

The main effort to synthesise feminist and degrowth analysis of capitalism, development and globalisation comes from the non-English speaking world, as well as the activist, rather than research-led, part of the debate. The Eurocentric character of degrowth has been the starting point of this thesis, which speaks to the one-dimensional and incompleteness of degrowth's liberation project.

Grassroots movements and subaltern perspectives, outside and within Europe, are starting to challenge that. Feminist degrowth must make explicit "the connection between gender, class, heterosexuality as *racialized*" (Lugones, 2007 my emphasis). Depatriarchalising degrowth therefore involves the recognition of the complex relationship between race and gender that expresses itself not only in the "distribution of care work and power across hierarchies of gender, [but also of] class and ethnicity" (D'Alisa et al., 2014b, p. 63). Theorising the complex interaction between these intersecting discriminations and their relevance for socioecological transformation is a feasible step towards depatriarchalising degrowth. Chapter Seven scrutinises the coloniality of gender that is relevant to

the Buen Vivir context in more detail. The conclusion, 'Chapter 8: Ecologies of Knowledges: A Decolonial Framework for the Politics of Degrowth', picks up on those themes in providing synergies between feminist analyses of degrowth and Buen Vivir. Before concluding this chapter, however, a brief word is necessary on trends towards eugenics in liberal environmentalism.

4.2.3. A Question of Birth Control?

This subsection briefly addresses degrowth and population, which is necessarily a feminist topic. Early ecological economists assumed a Neo-Malthusian attitude towards population control as an invaluable tool for keeping consumption and production at ecologically sustainable levels (Boulding, 1988; Daily et al., 1994; Daly, 1974; Ehrlich, 1971). This argument goes back to philosophers like Thomas Malthus, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (Kallis, 2019; Quinn, 2008), and has made a comeback within climate change research and ecological economics (Alcott, 2012; O'Neill et al., 2010). It stands in stark contrast to degrowth principles of autonomy, including autonomy over one's life and body. Obviously, this is not the same as denying birth control. Yet policies aimed at decreasing population growth, and thus implicitly, the fertility of women and men, recall eugenic practices towards homosexuals, disabled people and Jews in the Third Reich, forced sterilisation of indigenous women in Peru in the 1990s, or the campaign to sterilise the mentally ill in the UK during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

However, papers exploring the "many environmental and societal benefits to ongoing fertility reduction in the human population" show that rapid reductions in

our *ecological footprint* and *consumption of irreplaceable goods* are more “productive” in ensuring the preservation of ecosystems in the short term (Bradshaw and Brook, 2014). French Green Party politician (and sometime degrowth advocate) Yves Cochet ignored these findings when calling for a “strike of the third child” or “womb strike” involving fines for couples who have more than two children. He justified this position with “each child means, in terms of pollution, the equivalent of 620 round trips between Paris and New York” (cited from Cornel, 2015; D’Alisa et al., 2014b, p. 65). For the “Voluntary Extinction Movement”,

(e)ach time another one of us decides to not add another one of us to the burgeoning billions already squatting on this ravaged planet, another ray of hope shines through the gloom (Cornel, 2015).

Statements like these are particularly problematic when made in a didactic manner that continues to conflate the environmental impact derived from consumption with that of population.

Within degrowth, Taibo considers these Neo-Malthusian arguments a version of social Darwinism (2014, p. 21). “Voluntary” ought to be the key word in all aspects pertaining to female choice over her own body. Birth control should not be pressed onto women. The destruction of our global, life-supporting ecosystems has been, and in the foreseeable future will be, caused by quantitative differences in consumption, or affluence. If everybody lived the lifestyle of a Western European, travelling by plane several times a year, perhaps the planet could only support one billion people. If we take the communal lifestyle of Burkina Faso as a reference point, the planet could support 23 billion people (Lavignotte, 2010, p.

62; Taibo, 2014, p. 21). This is not to say that everybody should (or could) live the same life as people in Burkina Faso. It does, however, expose the absurdity – and danger – of the population control argument.

To reiterate – degrowth as a movement argues against population control, not just from a moral point of view, but from empirically supported research findings (Alcott, 2010, 2008). For Taibo (2014, pp. 20), the population question is distinctively anthropocentric and ignores the rights or otherwise of all other species we share this planet with. These arguments were explored in ‘4.1. Provincialising Degrowth’, and are further substantiated in Part II.

This main section, ‘4.2. Depatriarchalising Degrowth’, has provided arguments for a more sustained engagement between degrowth and feminist economics at macroeconomic level. Furthermore, from a decolonial point of view, to depatriarchalise degrowth requires intersectional analyses of both gendered *and* racialised access to resources, public services, etc. As such, this main section has pointed to traditions, scholars, and disciplines who already undertake such analyses. Eco-feminism, socialist feminism, and decolonial feminisms can provide useful angles for equitably reducing production and consumption levels within a gender justice framework. The last main section of this chapter continues to engage with theories and practices from the Global South by exploring degrowth and democracy.

4.3. Democratising Degrowth

This main section aims to expand contemporary debates on degrowth and democracy by looking at ways in which radical democracy is practiced outside

Europe. To the questions that arose from the previous chapter's discussion ('3.2.2. Democracy'), it adds whether 'radical pluralism', a theory and practice from the Global South, can provide answers and tools for the autonomous, "convivial" society that degrowth imagines. Scholars like Bonfil Batalla and Raimon Panikkar have contrasted the concept of radical pluralism with the individualistic, Western sense of autonomy. Radical pluralism is grounded in the difference of others, not their homogeneity as a group. Furthermore, I argue that 'nowtopias', or the implementation of the degrowth principles of autonomy and localisation, can be found in radical democracy experiments outside Europe, for example in Mexico, Rojava, as well as Bolivia and Ecuador. This subsection therefore reflects on radical pluralism, radical democracy in practice, and direct democracy in order to broaden, and indeed 'provincialise', degrowth debates around democracy.

4.3.1. Radical Pluralism

Social movements in Latin America and elsewhere embrace "Radical Pluralism" based on cultural diversity and relativity that moves away from the language of plurality, universalism and relativism (Esteva, 2015, p. 82). Post-modern discourse challenges Western hegemonic claims to universality, truth and rationality. It suggests that in a plural society, indigenous groups may contribute to the democratic process that is enabled by this plurality (Buche, 1994, p. 122). Mexican ethnologist and anthropologist Bonfil Batalla, however, argues that "plurality" itself is a Western concept that obscures and perpetuates the colonial power relation behind the construction (or rather, negation) of the (inferior/indigenous) Other, while conflating heterogeneity with socio-economic inequality (Bonfil Batalla, 1991, p. 37, 1987, p. 120). Aymara intellectual Marcelo Fernández Osco

clarifies that in Bolivia, there is no indigenous community that is autonomous in the individualistic Western sense, but that indigenous autonomy is an expression of the political pluriverse that navigates complementing and co-existing differences (2008, p. 30). Thus, pluralism is understood not in its abstract, metaphysical-essential sense that delineates a dualistic relationship between the state and indigenous or other social groups, but as a practical, existential question in relation to the Other (Panikkar, 1990, p. 19). The Zapatistas today are the intellectual descendants of those who concluded that “the cosmos is a pluriverse, and not a universe” (Panikkar, 1979). The pluriverse as a new political and epistemological paradigm has already been put into practice. The new constitutions in Ecuador and Bolivia, which nominally have transformed these states into plurinational democracy, challenge the basic assumptions that underlie Western democracy and pluralism, albeit on the level of the nation state. Chapters Six and Seven explore the importance of plurinationality and interculturality for the Ecuadorian indigenous movements, and alternatives to development such as Buen Vivir.

Yet, radical pluralism is argued to be incompatible with the modern nation state. The latter is the institutional arrangement of a homogenous group of people, said to share the same culture and language (Bonfil Batalla, 1991, p. 103; Esteva, 2015, p. 82). Its foundation, based on individual ownership and citizenship, means that the modern nation state cannot grant collective rights. Legislation in France that since 2004 bans “conspicuous signs of religious affiliation” in public schools, for example, forcibly prevents the constitution of mixed identities (French Muslim/French Algerian etc.) that deviate from French universalism. An

oxymoron, French universalism is paradoxically and nonetheless understood as the expression of the republican values of secularism and individualism (“Frenchness”; in Scott, 2009, p. 6). Radical Democracy in the Global South, however, managed to carve out territories and collective ways of being that acknowledge cultural diversity – “a world in which many worlds fit” (EZLN, 1996) *outside* the traditional realm of the nation state.

Radical democracy is the expression of people’s power, that is, not a form of government, but the *end* of government (Lummi, 1996, cited in Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p. 157). For post-colonial writers, the latter is considered to be a product of colonisation, globalisation and the subsequent emergence of the post-colonial, modern nation state. The modern state is understood to have undermined the “democracy of the commons” by dissolving local, self-managing political bodies for the benefit of a capitalist system (Esteva, 2009; *Ibid* 1998, p. 151; Shiva, 2015). However, criticism of representative democracy has also gained momentum in the context of the crisis-ridden Mediterranean societies of Europe. The Spanish 15M/*Indignados* movement’s slogan “no-one represents us” aims to highlight some of the flaws of representative democracy in one of Europe’s younger democracies (Asara, 2015, p. 100). Initially radical, left-wing parties such as Syriza in Greece, or Podemos in Spain failed to prevent the implementation of stringent austerity measures. Some therefore conclude that *being governed*, through elections or otherwise, produces inequality and powerlessness in itself (Gelderloos, 2016, p. 237; Gillespie, 2016). Nevertheless, Green Parties, trade unions and social movements such as Extinction Rebellion or Fridays for Future

have shaped public debates about, and concern with, a socially just transition to an ecologically sustainable economy – from Germany to Ireland, the UK and elsewhere.

Furthermore, representative democracy is said to rest on false assumptions of equality and justice that fail to acknowledge inequalities in capacity, needs, abilities and responsibilities between the sexes, the young and old, the ill and the healthy etc. (Bookchin, 2005, p. 73; Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p. 169). True freedom rests on the recognition of these inequalities. However, the practice of formally representing a national plurality of identities with a “minimal minority” is impractical at best, and can be discriminating and marginalising at worst (Bookchin, 2005, p. Ibid; Dahl Rendtorff, 2008; Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p. Ibid). For Castoriadis, an autonomous society is capable of analysing the historical origins of their institutions, and by extension critically challenge and modify them, e.g. in case of discrimination or marginalisation (Varvarousis, 2019). The social imaginary, “the shared collective imagination distilled in specific institutions, which operates as the “glue” that holds a society together”, may be altered in societies that rely on exogenous or transcendental truths (Ibid). The doctrine of economic growth can be considered such a transcendental truth.

Latouche’s call to ‘decolonise our social imaginary’ from economic growth therefore requires a self-reflection and questioning of the “unceasing and essentially *undetermined* (social-historical and psychical) creation of figures/forms/images” and institutions that shape personal and collective identities (“the nation”, “the economy”) (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 3). Both necessitate

not the elimination of the 'Other', but the recognition of their existence in relation to the self (Ibid; Kavoulakos, 2006). Abolishing economic growth as a social objective must therefore be accompanied by critical investigations and reflections into, for example, nationhood, that is, how a society has historically defined its in-and out-groups, and which (historical) responsibilities, traumas and political practices result from it. In Western thought, classical Greek democracy is often considered the most perfect expression of an institutional imaginary. Its participatory decision-making processes demonstrated that direct democracy can be institutionalised in the absence of bureaucracy (Bookchin, 2005, p. 206; Dahl Rendtorff, 2008). Yet, radical democracy, "understood as the practical alternative to representation" (Esteva, 2009) and as a historical movement (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 160) has been practiced at the grassroots level across the globe, challenging the modern nation state's democratic systems, and in some instances winning *de facto* and *de jure* recognition. The following subsection briefly reviews experiences with radical democracy in Mexico and Kurdistan.

4.3.2. Radical Democracy in practice

In August 1995, the Mexican state passed a law that recognised the autonomy of The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), the indigenous local council and movement (Esteva, 2007). The process put an end to party politics at the local level by shaping a political space that indigenous peoples helped generate legitimacy for. This victory for the peoples of Oaxaca demonstrates the importance of using both political and legal procedures in changing customs of exclusion, control, domination and hierarchy (Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p. 167; Illich, 1973, p. 95). The APPO represents a poststructuralist inversion of modern

political governance by refusing to speak for society at large, instead focussing on governing locally. Esteva and Prakash argue that

In their 'commons', 'the people' are attached to each other by duties & obligations, not by abstract notion of rights. They are bound together by the common "sense" that is part of belonging; of participating in shaping or sharing common ways of living and dying (1998, p. 158).

Nevertheless, "the commons" take on different forms of social existence, depending on their cultural context. Across Latin America, commons are redefined to implement communal land ownership that is neither land tenure, nor private or public ownership; in Oaxaca, for example 85% of territory is held communally (Esteva, 2015, p. 85). Esteva (2015, p. 86, 2014) argues that these new (and old) commons have the potential to replace the individual as society's core cell.

Following the Zapatista Army of National Liberation's (EZLN) declaration of war against the Mexican state on 1st January 1994, the day the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect, the Zapatistas asserted *de facto* autonomy over a small territory in Chiapas. Membership of the Good Governance Councils, or *caracoles*, is based on face-to-face assemblies in which every adult participates. Seats rotate every 8 days, so that individuals may return to their family, crops or work after a short time (Zibechi, 2012, p. 140). For the Zapatistas, this leadership style, titled *mandar obedeciendo*, to lead by obeying, has dismantled hierarchies and created people's power from below (Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, 2014). Governing becomes a responsibility, rather than privilege, and serves to increase the council's legitimacy and ability to coordinate collective action (Latouche, 2009, p. 45; Zibechi, 2012, p. 140).

Similarly, in Rojava, the Northern Syrian Kurdish autonomous region, participatory democracy is exercised in popular assemblies, ethnically balanced councils, women and youth councils, committees, community self-defence, as well as self-managed worker cooperatives. The councils and cooperatives operate across many social levels along ecological, anti-authoritarian, egalitarian and feminist principles inspired by Bookchin, Butler and the Zapatistas (“Charter of the Social Contract,” 2014; Clark, 2016; Graeber, 2014). The councils co-exist and overlap with more formal quasi-governmental structures. Although ecology is an explicit aim of the Rojava project, the realities of the Syrian civil war context necessitate petroleum production, consumption and export, alongside more widespread fossil fuel use.

As in most revolutions and historical communes, the “democratic dilemma” Latouche anticipated presents itself in Rojava too. Refugees fleeing conflict in Syria and areas formerly controlled by the self-proclaimed Islamic State present a demographic challenge to the scale of councils and committees (Miste, 2017; van Wilgenburg, 2016). Members are forced to consider further dividing along geographical lines to retain direct democratic control (Clark, 2016). Turkish invasions further exacerbate this issue, as militias need to be deployed for territorial control and protection.

Some critics contrast Rojava’s pyramidal, state-like governing structure that is centralised at the top with the inverted, more egalitarian pyramidal governing structures of the Haudenosaunee (Gelderloos, 2016, p. 240). Local, spiritual, social or household-based forms of power effectively prevented the formation of a state

and promoted harmony through reciprocal relations within a confederacy, terminated only by the American Revolutionary War (Gelderloos, 2016; Graeber, 2012). The Kurds in Rojava will find their own solutions, and in the process stretch notions of what constitutes “radical democracy” and self-rule further.

Degrowth draws inspiration for localising the economy and democracy from the ancient Greeks (see ‘2.4.1. Industrialisation, Technology and Autonomy’). The total devotion of the Aristotelian citizen to their *polis* is an early inspiration to the regional, federal approach to self-determination and social ethic envisaged by Latouche. The Zapatistas and the Rojava Kurds ought to be contemporary ones, even if the Zapatistas represent by no means the first post-modern re-socialisation of the ethics of governing. Rojava, moreover, while an experiment in radical democracy, cannot be categorised as inspiration for degrowth in terms of environmental credentials. Both the Zapatistas and the Rojava Kurds, however, represent excellent contemporary examples of self-organisation and radical democracy that operates without a formal nation-state. They do not represent the Orientalist Other, but a “revolutionary Other” (Clark, 2016). Their autonomy can be understood in Castoriadis’ sense as “the ability of a collective to decide its future in common, freed from external (‘heteronomous’) imperatives and givens” such as religion or economics (D’Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 8). Their autonomy could also be a blueprint for degrowth, as Latouche (2009, p. 95) admits that the nation state would most likely be unsuitable for degrowth transition processes.

With regards to contemporary initiatives, Latouche cites the ‘new communes’ network in Italy as “one of the most original and most promising initiatives” that

address the socio-ecological issues of the industrialised society at a local level (Latouche, 2009, 2007a, p. 45). Latouche places it in the context of the “slow food” and “slow city” movements that, while maintaining local levels of protection against external standardisation and market forces, may operate on a global level by exchanging ideas (2009, p. 47). He took the Italian communes as primary example for exercising the political foundations of degrowth. He thereby attempts to position degrowth as the reversal of societal individualisation that has occurred since the conquest of ancient Greece and later the Reformation, without necessarily theorising what the alternative, more communal life would look like, for example with regards to the management of common resources.

Autonomous regions where people exercise radical democracy and effectively challenge oppressive structures related to the modern nation state today can be found mostly outside Europe. Indeed, Latouche cites Esteva’s *Celebration of Zapatismo* (2004) in *Farewell to Growth*, and recognised the work of many non-European theorists and activists. In one piece, he describes Chiapas as a bioregion (2007a) – a concept elaborated on in subsection ‘2.5.2. Localising the economy’. I therefore argue that the contribution and inspiration of non-European “ecomunicipalism” for degrowth is larger than assumed, or than is acknowledged in the degrowth literature, including in *Farewell to Growth*. To Latouche, I would add that the Zapatistas, Kurds across the Middle East,¹³ and indigenous peoples

¹³ The Kurdish Makhmour refugee camp, for example, located near Hawler (Erbil) in Northern Iraq was built and is governed communally. Each neighbourhood commune includes a women’s commune. The education system, health care, economy and agriculture are all self-managed. A woman’s testimony stands for the success of self-organisation: “They fear us, because we stand on our feet. We did not trust anyone to save us, we took our fate into our own hands and created our own self-defence and social system. We made life sweeter by organizing ourselves” (Dirik, 2015).

across the Global South embody the pluriverse that could inspire degrowth politics and practices of democracy. At the time of Latouche's writing, the social revolution and military uprising in Rojava had yet to crystallise; however, the ongoing social revolution in Chiapas had occurred over a decade before.

This main section, '4.3. Democratising Degrowth', makes the connections between non-European practices of radical democracy and degrowth more explicit. It acknowledges that close connection between degrowth ideas about democracy and practices of radical democracy in the Global South. Degrowth, therefore, does not just draw inspiration for localising the economy and democracy from the ancient Greeks, but from the peoples outside Europe. Democratising degrowth therefore goes hand in hand with provincializing degrowth. So far, this main section has introduced the theory and praxis of radical pluralism and radical democracy from the Global South. The proceeding subsection examines how degrowth considers the social revolutions and political changes outside Europe that can be said to adhere to the principles of degrowth.

4.5.4. Direct democracy in organic societies

The supposed 'natural', co-constituting relationship between degrowth and democracy, or 'egalitarian democratisation' has come under some scrutiny. Romano (2012) contends that degrowth's language of impending doom (change society, consumption, production – or else) does nothing to visualise environmental destruction to the public. It thereby reproduces the distant expert/non-expert relationship in which the former "can judge the legitimacy of

Since 2018, Turkish rocket and drone attacks, ostensibly targeted at outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK, have killed at least eight people (Frantzman, 2021; Goran, 2017; SCF, 2018).

life models chosen by common people". If ecology was 'established' as an a-priori, a-political pointer for collective decision-making, he questions the need for a non-technocratic system (Ibid). However, Asara's field work with members of the *Indignados* movement has shown that awareness of the links between environmental degradation and economic growth can spread horizontally, through videos, assemblies and discussions among neighbours (2016). This model removes the expert by allowing people to make up their own minds and make ecological decisions autonomously. Cattaneo's and Gavalda's (2010) analysis of rural-urban squats in Barcelona confirms that degrowth can work if it is "a collectively consented choice of life, not an externally-imposed imperative". The ability of a collective to give itself its own laws has been proven to be possible in practice, albeit at local, rather than national scale. Yet, Romano's criticism takes us back to Latouche's lack of "existing preconditions" for establishing a degrowth society.

Based on the literature I reviewed, I argue that those preconditions seem to be first, the creation of environmental consciousness in citizens; second, moving away from the language of doom and catastrophe, and third, focussing on everyone's capabilities, as well as duties. Seeing the socio-ecological crisis as a starting, rather than endpoint for something not necessarily better, but just different, would allow society to ease into such a transition. Asara's interviewees have demonstrated that there's some consensus on the profound need to change towards a political culture that is critical of representative democracy itself, not just capitalism or the banking sector (2015). Her interviewees explicitly appraise assemblies and self-organization for their learning and participation-fuelling potential (Ibid, p. 102). Creating a political culture characterised by an

appreciation of self-organisation, or “real democracy”, in the *indignado*’s own language, goes hand with creating a culture of environmental consciousness. Their statements hint towards the social origin of our domination over nature; namely, the hierarchical, exploitative and dominant relations towards other human beings. Appreciation of horizontal organisation structures, critical attitudes towards consumerism and appetite for environmental protection in the public can thus never be a top-down project, and would potentially require another pre-condition: the erasure of hierarchy and dominance in human relations.

I identified three pre-conditions for degrowth: environmental consciousness, positive language, and balancing of capabilities and duties. These three conditions could be met by what Murray Bookchin calls an ‘organic society’. An organic society is constituted by non-hierarchical, mutualistic relationship patterns, and lacks of structures of domination, economic classes and a political state (Bookchin, 2005, pp. 25, 26, 110). Such an organic society seems most suited to (re-)establishing a society’s connection with the natural environment and subsequent emergence of an environmental consciousness. The *Indignados* have proven that this is both desirable, as well as possible, without expert intervention. The jump from egalitarian society to ecological decision-making does not require everyone to be the same, nor to have the same political, social, or ecological principles. But by replacing the technocratic layer of bureaucracy with an egalitarian approach, direct democracy can be made possible at local levels in Europe. It would furthermore enable the abolition of the expert-ruler-economist, since less complex systems can do away with a managing class. To this end, Elinor and Vincent Ostrom’s research findings suggest that “self-governing associations

wish to govern themselves and live in their world in a sustainable way” (Allen, 2014, p. 245). They stress the importance of learning, creativity and adaptation in finding solutions to those resource management systems that have failed (Ibid). The Ostroms’ idea of “polycentric” governance would allow for the rise of a non-hierarchical, mutualistic ‘organic’ society.

The preceding subsection has shown that the Zapatistas are a real-world example of such an organic, polycentric society. They have established a collective territory whose tilling, cultivation, and protection is in the community’s interest (Latouche, 2009, p. 45). By returning not just duties and responsibilities, but also the fruits of labour and land to a collective, the direct decision-making process will protect what is ecologically healthy within an organic society’s bioregion, as Latouche would call it. Ecological decision-making ought to be in the self-interest of those working and living off the land, as we have seen with the *Indignados*, even though a society that practices direct democracy is by no means guaranteed to become more ecological, or less concerned with affluence. Indeed, this is a controversial point within degrowth (Fotopoulos, 2010b; Trainer, 2010).

A “local ecological democracy” (Latouche, 2009, p. 44) thus requires economic autonomy as well as new forms of self-rule. Autonomy and egalitarianism are therefore as important with regards to direct democracy as measurably decreasing material throughput. This is possible because degrowth is not a dogma, but a path that can be shared with many other life-respecting and -affirming ones, but not with racist, nativist or otherwise authoritarian projects. ‘The local’ is thus both an ontological place that requires defending against extraction, land grabs, or the

effects of neoliberal policies, as well as a political project towards emancipation and respect. The local is “not a closed microcosm, but a linkage in a network of horizontal, virtuous and solidarity relations” that together may counteract the negative effects of the global market (Latouche, 2007a). In practice, that means freedom of movement, the freedom to live in big cities etc. Romano’s (2012) criticism of the authoritarian demands of some degrowthers to limit the number of inhabitants to 30,000 per territorial unit is thus valid, if moot. The ability of a collective to decide their own future by giving themselves their own laws cannot keep an individual from settling elsewhere.

To try to prevent communities giving themselves laws that are based on exclusionary policies towards people of a different ethnicity, descent or origin, the degrowth community needs to address the history and contemporary effects of colonialism. This requires considering how the legacies of colonialism and coloniality, that is, the power differential between subject and object of colonialism, as well as the logic of domination have come to shape our current world (see for example Mignolo, 2005). Capital initially accumulated due to massive, violent appropriation of land, labour and knowledge into hands of a small European minority. It has accumulated to such a destructive extent that we need to degrow affluent economies to stay within planetary boundaries. European colonialism began with the arrival of Columbus in what is today called Hispaniola, and in preceding centuries appropriated large parts of the Asian and African continents as well (Castañeda, 2012; Quijano, 2007; Williams, 1944). This thesis supports the argument made by others, from within and outside degrowth (Dengler and Seebacher, 2019; Escobar, 2015; Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019): that

degrowth cannot be an eco-egalitarian project alone. It must also become a decolonial one.

This subsection has identified three pre-conditions for the emergence of a sustainable degrowth society, based on the literature review contained in Part I of this thesis. These are the creation of environmental consciousness; abandoning the language of doom and catastrophe; and focussing on everyone's capabilities, as well as duties. This subsection has also suggested that Murray Bookchin's notion of an organic society contains the seeds to the creation of these pre-conditions. As a lesson for direct democracy and degrowth, organic societies are a non-hierarchical, ecologically sustainable, and self-governing model of local governance. They could form the basis of future research into deepening the democratisation of degrowth. The following main section investigates some broader questions that have been raised, both from within and outside degrowth. These concern the three points most often raised; namely, institutionalisation, strategy, and implementation. Chapter Four's fourth main section concludes with some broader philosophical reflections regarding degrowth's engagement with autonomy.

4.4. Other Degrowth criticism and synergies

This chapter's last main section prior to the conclusion engages with some common degrowth criticism and synergies that were not taken up in the three previous points (provincialising, depatriarchalising, and democratising degrowth). I have included them because questions around institutionalisation, strategy, and implementation are some of the most common points of concern for degrowthers

and sympathetic (or unsympathetic) outsiders alike. First, a common critique of degrowth, for example delivered by van den Bergh (2011), is that while degrowth delivers a strong normative critique, it lacks practical suggestions on how to institutionalise its agenda. However, in the years since van den Bergh's article, a substantial amount of research has occurred, which is reflected in the preceding two chapters' variety of practical examples and suggestions. What is arguably needed, however, is an overall strategy. While leaving conceptual space for other ways of thinking, conversations are occurring within the degrowth movement on how to implement its key policies, possibly by taking advantage of a strong public anti-privatisation mood in countries like the UK. Degrowth, apart from a practical policy programme, needs a narrative, as Berg and Hukkinen (2011) suggest. Their analysis of Finnish government representatives' perspective suggests that the failure to deliver a strong, coherent narrative of what a degrowth society would look like in practice, in fact strengthened dominance of the growth story, even amongst those critical of it.

Second, and in addition to lack of narrative, many critics point to insufficient analyses of required institutional changes, said to obscure some of the practical obstacles to degrowth (Buch-Hansen, 2014; Joutsenvirta, 2016). Similarly, Weiss and Cattaneo (2017) claim that "a positive rather than normative approach to degrowth can make the academic discourse more credible". Certainly, degrowth authors do not deny that policy should be evidence based, and indicators of degrowth ought to and have been formulated (O'Neill, 2012; Verma, 2017). I suggest that qualitative and quantitative approaches complement each other, and that their combination can support transitions to a low-carbon future. Indeed, as I

have argued previously, combining both natural and social sciences, and thereby overcoming their social distinction, is required for a more profound understanding of the limits that science, knowledge, and our socially constructed world impose. The Anthropocene's challenge to the ontological separation of "us" and "nature" has thrown the need for their combination into sharper focus. A normative approach furthermore has the potential to contribute to a broader and more accessible degrowth narrative, which has been shown to be a prerequisite for political acceptance within establishment structures. The previous chapter introduced non-reformist reforms as both a conceptual and practical tool to work within existing structures, without perpetuating them.

Third, the practical implementation of degrowth is inevitably the least empirically tested one. Hall's (2017) research into a degrowth-resembling, neo-monastic community in North Carolina showed that residents did not get used to sharing means or pooling resources. Their most significant challenges were interpersonal conflict and "accepting the idea of doing less". These findings point to the fact that degrowth requires a reevaluation of social values, or to put it simply: degrowth needs to talk about what it means to live communally. A similar criticism is degrowth's lack of engagement with how it would work in extremely unequal societies such as the US, where ethnic minorities and the working class are bearing the brunt of the negative effects of neo-liberalism, free trade and environmental pollution (Gilmore, 2013). Generally, degrowth shies away from talking about race or ethnicity, which are some of the most persistent indicators of inequality.

Finally, institutional economists (van den Bergh and Kallis, 2012) argue that the validity of the correlation between ‘downscaling’ the economy and realisation of environmental goals cannot be known *ex ante*, especially given any number of unknown social outcomes, as for example described by Hall (2017). Romano (2012) views degrowth as another “technique” because it has nothing to say about the *sense* of life, given its sole focus on survival and/or wellbeing. In doing so, he argues that degrowth remains stuck within a reverse paradigm of growth, promoting biological survival regardless of its sense. Romano (2012) thereby argues that in its individualistic form, degrowth “leaves the problem of collective sense and democracy unresolved” – an issue previously discussed. However, his arguments rely on an interpretation of degrowth that diverges from this thesis’ arguments. I argue that degrowth has a strong normative claim to autonomy, which includes the freedom of others. As such, it cannot resolve the inherent contradiction between autonomy and the freedom to consume. Convivial relations can be strengthened, but no one can be forced to live in a commune or materially downshift. Degrowth is thereby an inherently limited project that must contend with the fact that some ecosystems will inevitably collapse unless put under immediate and enforced protection. However, this is not saying that implementing egalitarian principles won’t be able to prevent ecological collapse.

This subsection concludes by engaging with claims made by Romano (2012), who argues that the autarky or self-sufficiency contained in Latouche’s bioregions are archetypal “modern” aspirations. Indeed, they reflect a Robinson Crusoe understanding of the modern, enterprising, lone subject. This is in part a criticism this thesis makes, while pointing to non-Western concepts that may complement

the search for autarky. One of them is a relational understanding of autonomy (Osco, 2008, p. 30), as discussed in subsection '4.3.1. Radical Pluralism'. Similarly, a part of degrowth tradition sees others as constitutive of the subject, pointing to a more relational understanding of community and thus perhaps autonomy (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 108; Deriu, 2014b, p. 55). Yet, within degrowth, autonomy is often merely understood as the ability to shape and satisfy one's needs, to escape the 'modernisation of poverty' (Illich, 1973, p. 8), rather than the construction of a different kind of modern subjectivity. Romano almost cedes the point himself: "we must yield autonomy to gain more autonomy" – whether one applies Greek or Aymara philosophy, degrowth can arise when the subject "deflates his/her own vision [to] accept and implement the vision built by the community he/she belongs to" (Romano, 2012). This new subject that learns to "be less" can also learn to "have less", he says. The argument this subsection has made is that to "be less" means to exist democratically in a community, whereby relations delimit social and economic actions. Part II develops these ideas in more detail, in particular with regards to relational limits to growth.

This subsection has complemented this chapter's call for a broader, provincialising, depatriarchalising, and democratising research agenda for degrowth. While being neither exhaustive, nor able to resolve these issues, it discussed valid concerns around degrowth institutionalisation, strategy, and implementation. It has also introduced the idea that living democratically in a community has the potential to limit economic growth. This argument in particular will be developed further the last two parts of this thesis. The following main section presents this chapter's conclusion, which moves the thesis on to Part II – Decentring Europe.

4.5. Towards a Degrowth Pluriverse

This Chapter has put degrowth into conversation with decolonial and postdevelopment theories, environmental justice movements, feminisms, and radical democracy approaches. My aim was to tease out some of the most relevant gaps within degrowth, and identify areas for further research. Chapter Four therefore suggests for the field to continue with efforts to provincialise, depatriarchalise, and democratise degrowth. I hope that my contribution advances degrowth but as a field of study and social movement.

The first process I suggest, provincializing degrowth, recognises and addresses the positionality of degrowth activism and epistemology within a European political-economic and scientific context. I argued that this Eurocentric focus is most prevalent in the absence of environmental justice analyses, and degrowth's anthropocentric conceptualisation of nature and the Anthropocene. In the next chapter, Chapter Five, I point to political and cultural alternatives to anthropocentrism. The second process I suggest, depatriarchalising degrowth, demands a more systematically gendered analysis of policy proposals, and economic models that propose to radically alter consumption and production patterns. I insisted that intersectional gender analyses beyond care performance must be at the forefront of socioecological transition designs.

With the third point, democratising degrowth, I suggest degrowth scholarship reflect on the democratic processes and theories of social revolutions and political changes outside Europe, for instance by the Zapatistas in Mexico or the Kurds in Rojava. Radical pluralism thought from the Global South recognises pluralism as

practical, existential question in relation to the Other, rather than a mere relationship between state and citizens (Panikkar, 1990, p. 19). Radical democracy, practiced in these communities with varying levels of tensions and contradictions, can be an inspiration for instantiating and sustaining a democratic socioecological transition towards degrowth. Rather than simply copy these practices, degrowth could support and create their locally and culturally contingent equivalents. Indeed, the call for radical pluralism doesn't imply that degrowth adopt a relational or otherwise cosmology, but that the different practices that create and sustain those cosmologies co-exist in a pluriverse, albeit under asymmetrical power relations (see 'coloniality of reality' in '7.3. Cosmological limits to growth: The Political Ontology of Sumak Kawsay').

To conclude, degrowth is part of a pluriverse of alternatives to economic growth and development (Kothari et al., 2019). As such, attempts to provincialise, depatriarchalise, and democratise degrowth ought to be understood as efforts to enable and develop degrowth allyship with environmental justice, and feminist and other radical social and political movements. Degrowth's Eurocentrism limits its relevance to industrialised countries. Overcoming it would increase the movement's scope and validity. Therefore, the next chapter substantiates the first point, and provincialise degrowth with respect to its ecological analysis of growth and anthropocentric, dualist conceptualisation of nature.

Part II – Decentring Europe

Chapter 5: Provincialising the Nature of Degrowth

We need to learn to de-grow so that we don't decay.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2013, p. 33)

The previous chapter laid out three developing areas of research that aim to expand degrowth scholarship: provincialising, depatriarchalising, and democratising degrowth. In the present chapter, I substantiate arguments towards the provincialisation of degrowth. More specifically, Chapter Five represents an effort to provincialise degrowth's conceptualisation of nature.¹⁴ This narrower focus fits the scope of the thesis. Theoretically, it prepares Chapter Seven's arguments concerning the political ontology and economy of Buen Vivir. The conclusion this thesis puts forth, a decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth, also hinges on concepts developed in the present chapter. These concepts are cosmological limits to growth, ontological pluralism, and the coloniality of nature. The chapter is structured as follows.

First, I conceptualise the modernity/coloniality discourse, which is the theoretical lens through which I approach the second part of this thesis. I articulate the colonialities of nature and gender in detail, given their respective relevance for provincialising degrowth (present chapter), and examining the gender politics of Buen Vivir (Chapter Seven). Second, I critically interrogate the ontological foundations of degrowth's ecological analysis of growth through the lens of the modernity/coloniality discourse. This part begins with a necessarily brief, colonial history of the idea of nature. The examination of the colonial history of nature

¹⁴ I am indebted to Michela Colleta's and Malayna Raftopoulos' volume on provincialising nature (2016) for inspiring me to approach degrowth from Latin America environmental perspectives.

serves to highlight the sociocultural foundations of degrowth's mechanistic anthropocentrism, and deliver a critique of the presumed universality of the conceptualisation of nature within degrowth. This universalism inadvertently perpetuates the coloniality of nature. To conclude, the chapter proposes cultural and political alternatives to degrowth's anthropocentrism. First, I suggest attributing agency to the non-human world to overcome anthropocentric forms of analyses, drawing on ecological research to propose a non-anthropocentric ontology. Second, I argue for enshrining non-human agency through the theorisation and application of Rights of Nature. Before arriving at this conclusion and conceptualising the modernity/coloniality discourse in more detail, I will begin by demonstrating the benefits of analysing degrowth from this perspective.

5.1. The Modernity/Coloniality Discourse

5.1.1. Making Degrowth a Decolonial Project

Modernity/Coloniality

Degrowth argues for the decolonisation of our imaginary from the tyranny of (growth-based) economics (Latouche, 2014b, 2004). This thesis adds to those efforts by decolonising our imaginary from colonial structures of domination evident in attitudes towards the natural environment. Modernity/coloniality (MC) thinkers argue that these systems of domination, not just of nature, but of gender, race and knowledge, become evident if we critically interrogate the period of modernity and its characteristic cultural and socioeconomic structures from historical Latin American perspectives. As discussed in the introduction, the discourse problematises the untainted view of modernity as an age of scientific,

technological and rational advances. These advances are instead contextualised within colonial conquest of land, labour, resources and knowledges by European colonial powers (Mignolo, 2007). Furthermore, MC goes beyond analysing the role of global production and consumption patterns in depleting planetary ecosystems. Echoing the Frankfurt School and extending Critical Theory's intellectual realm beyond Western Europe, it argues that as much as our imperial mode of living,¹⁵ it is our way of *thinking*, based on Enlightenment ideas such as logocentrism and instrumental rationalisation, that contributes to the environmental crises (Quijano, 2010). Modernity, and its constituent coloniality, are seen to be the central causes of the 'environmental problem'.

In this chapter, I therefore draw on MC analyses to argue that our way of *thinking* represents the cultural root of the 'environmental problem'. I explore how the binary ontological and philosophical assertion that nature is separate from society and culture, and above all, inert and dead, has facilitated environmental exploitation in the past and present (Merchant, 2020). I argue that degrowth has imported this Cartesian construction of nature from ecological economics, one of its main intellectual precursors (see Chapter Two). This affects degrowth research, policy proposals and theories of value (Andreotti et al., 2018; Gudynas, 2017). The MC discourse on the other hand increasingly recognises that market forces and human activity also subject nature to the logic of colonialism (coloniality), as well as the local knowledge systems responding to this oppression (Escobar, 2005). The MC analysis therefore foregoes the nature/culture dichotomy as well as charges of

¹⁵ The 'imperial mode of living' refers to extractive, exploitative and unequal, patterns of production, distribution and consumption, as well as to the cultural imaginaries and subjectivities rooted in the daily lives of the Global North, and, increasingly, in the upper and middle classes of emerging economies (Brand and Wissen, 2014).

revering nature or focussing solely on human agents. It can help situate new forms of degrowth analysis and categories that foster, rather than preclude, engagement with non-human agency and thriving.

Historicising and Re-positioning Degrowth

The MC discourse is useful in historicising and provincialising degrowth, exposing as provincial those claims and epistemic presumptions presented as universal (Chakrabarty, 2000). Degrowth cannot remain ahistorical if it is to address the legacies of colonialism and coloniality. Coloniality refers to the power differential between subject and object of colonialism, which produces multiple, intersecting dominations (Mignolo, 2007; see Bendix, 2017 for a similar critique of the German degrowth/Postwachstum debate). By ignoring history, we are blinded to those ways of life that were eradicated by ours (Santos, 2007). Nirmal and Rocheleau (2019) urge degrowth to consider an awareness of (neo-)colonialism that comes “to grips with territories and coloniality”. They argue for embedding degrowth within global movements of the majority world and moving beyond individualistic material concerns such as voluntary simplicity.

Re-positioning degrowth within a broad set of alternatives is based on the premise that it delivers an epistemological critique of our current civilisational crisis partially, but not entirely. It certainly has “identified more deeply-rooted flaws” (Andreotti et al., 2018) in the global system of financial capitalism and its constituent, economic growth. Degrowth also reconsiders what and how we know by focussing on other measurements or indicators of wellbeing and socio-economic (re)production (eudemonia rather than hedonism, regeneration of

eco-systems, focus on generation of use rather than exchange values). Degrowth wants to disrupt the “epistemic certainty” (Andreotti et al., 2018) surrounding the doctrine of economic growth, the ideology, measurement and importance of GDP and the subordination of life to economic rationality. It looks for alternative forms of development that are based on local, participatory economics and politics while simultaneously advocating technocratic policies informed by (economic) modelling (of degrowth scenarios, e.g. Vandeventer et al., 2019). Nevertheless, parts of degrowth scholarship reproduce a certain kind of universalism grounded in the ecologically unquestionable need to decrease consumption and production.

Consequently, degrowth is centred on the “down-scaling of production and consumption” (Schneider et al., 2010) by *affluent* communities. Yet, the assertions that degrowth in the North allows for economic growth in the global South (Kerschner, 2010), or that if not that, it at least frees up ecological space in the South (Kallis, 2017b, p. 22) are insufficient to challenge the colonial relations entrenched in modern societies. Race, gender and income continue to disproportionately affect income, wealth, and education, and by extension, health and resource access and consumption (Anguelovski, 2014b; Braveman and Gottlieb, 2014; Dorninger et al., 2021; Oswald et al., 2020; Swan, 2020). As recent degrowth scholarship acknowledges (Paulson et al., 2020, chap. 4), voluntary simplicity of affluent communities must be coupled with redistributive policies, taxation and public investment. It is not clear, however, how these policies would redress large inequalities in inter- and intranational resource consumption between high and low income groups (see for example Oswald et al., 2020).

Following post-development and (eco-)feminist scholars, Demaria et al (2019)

have begun asking the crucial questions of who produces what for whom and how much.

To overcome Eurocentrism with respect to degrowth's conceptualisation of nature, this chapter analyses the role of culture, colonialism and the global imposition of European cosmologies in the lead-up to the climate crisis. In doing so, we approach the cultural roots of the global Euro-Atlantic economic and political system that threatens to push past the planetary boundaries' safe operating space. As argued in the previous chapter, degrowth cannot be an eco-egalitarian project alone. It must be a decolonial one as well. Consequently, it is useful to explore the modernity/coloniality discourse, allowing for the development of a decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth in the final chapter.

5.1.2. The Colonial Matrix of Power

Writers and thinkers of the modernity/coloniality (MC) discourse neither exclusively dedicate themselves to this research project, nor have they agreed on a "manifesto", or statement of intent. Consensus exists though, however broadly, on three main arguments that rest on a shared conceptualisation of Quijano's "coloniality of power" and Dussel's "transmodernity" (Mignolo and Carballo, 2014, p. 23). Together, these three points aim to change the dominant narrative of modernity as a disembodied and dematerialised achievement of Western Europe. First, MC contributors argue that the industrial and scientific revolutions were facilitated and enabled by colonial processes, culminating in European political, economic, and *cultural* hegemony over the world (Mignolo, 2011a; Quijano,

2000a). These arguments build on analyses made by, amongst others, 20th century Marxist historians, who highlighted the political and economic processes behind the rise of capitalism, colonial exploitation and technological advances of the (British) industrial revolution (Hobsbawm, 1989; Williams, 1944). Although Hobsbawm's and Williams' analyses articulate the social histories of empire, the MC extend their arguments to subjectivities and knowledge and widen the remit of empire studies to Latin America. Consequently, MC thinkers argue that European colonial domination imparted the *cultural* hegemony of the Euro-Atlantic civilisational model and attendant ontological and epistemological principles onto the rest of the world.

Second, modernity is said to be constituted by a logic of domination in all aspects of life. 'Coloniality' therefore refers to a specific set of social relations that came to be the first *global*, systemic and interdependent model of power. Those interdependent and mutually reinforcing social relations have been maintained and expanded over 500 years of conquest and colonisation by European powers. They form a set of political, economic, socio-cultural control that has enabled Western European hegemony over the world. This control is exerted through the interaction of *knowledge*, *racism* and *capital* (Mignolo, 2007)¹⁶. It manifests itself across the axes of economy, intersubjectivity and knowledge, sex and gender, authority, and nature. These mutually reinforcing axes constitute the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMoP). Table 5.1 lays out the CMoP's ontological and epistemological foundations. It also relates those to the mechanisms that control

¹⁶ Thereby recognising that one factor alone, e.g. capitalism, militarism or patriarchy, cannot explain the successful and pervasive imposition of one particular worldview onto all other imageries (Grosfoguel, 2008; Quijano, 2000b).

and oppress those practices, worldviews and knowledges that deviate from the universal, civilisational benchmarks of European cosmology:

CMoP Axis	Ontological & Epistemological foundations	Mechanisms of control and domination
<i>Economy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self-contained, i.e. separate from ecological and social processes - fictitious commodities following Polanyi (2002) - the global market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - racialised and gendered division of salaried and non-salaried labour exploitation - international governance bodies (IMF, World Bank etc.) - appropriation of land and resources
<i>Intersubjectivity and Knowledge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European enlightenment & rationality as civilisational benchmarks for all non-Europeans - worldviews and subjectivities (e.g. “consumer”, “citizens”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - epistemic repression - cultural assimilation for profit - education
<i>Sex and Gender</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - binary and hierarchical notions of gender - heterosexuality as norm - nuclear family as standard household unit - ‘woman’ as fixed identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - heteronormative, patriarchal control and appropriation of female reproductive and domestic labour - violence against women - violence and discrimination against non-heteronormative forms of being and living

<i>Authority</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - modern nation state (binary inside-outside logic) - (human, political, civil) rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - state control of resources - militarism - international relations
<i>Nature</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - nature/culture binary founded on anthropocentrism - nature as passive object - ontological and epistemological prioritisation of culture over nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - subordination of nature to the market and human activity - non-recognition of non-human actors as agents in the making of history, landscapes, politics

Table 5.1 The Colonial Matrix of Power

Elaborated following Achinte and Rosero (2016), Coronil (2000b), Escobar (2010, 2005, 2000), Jiménez-Lucena (2008, pp. 7–8), Lander (2000b), Lugones et al. (2008), Mignolo and Escobar (2010), Mignolo and Carballo (2014, pp. 30–33, 36), Paredes (2017), Segato (2014), Quijano (2000a).

The conceptualisation of the coloniality of power has evolved since Quijano’s seminal text (1992). My inclusion of the coloniality of gender/sexuality and nature for example reflects the works of Lugones (2008) and Escobar (2010), amongst many others. The colonialities of gender and nature will be analysed in more detail after discussing MC’s third main argument, its main strengths and some criticism. To stay within the scope of the present work, the other axes won’t be analysed separately. To reiterate, MC argues that colonialism permitted European industrial advances and resulting domination over the rest of the world. Its second main argument is that the logic of domination, coloniality, is built into all aspects of

social, political, and economic life. These axes of domination are illustrated in the CMoP (see 'Table 5.1 The Colonial Matrix of Power').

Third, in practical terms, the MC project is built on 'de-linking' from the CMoP (Mignolo, 2007), specifically decolonising *knowledge* and *being*. *Epistemological* and *ontological* decolonisation from European knowledge categories and standards complement *political* and *economic* decolonisation from European colonial rule (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 1992). To do so, the authors argue for "epistemic shifts" (Mignolo, 2007) towards investigations that move beyond anthropocentric and/or heteronormative categories of analysis. Modes of enquiry that don't make use of those epistemic shifts would disguise provincialism (a historically specific culture) as universalism (a global set of values; Quijano, 2007). 'Decoloniality' demands perpetual reflexivity regarding geopolitical knowledge production, while engaging those epistemologies that have been rendered invisible by the (neo)colonial processes of marketisation, Christianisation and development (Mignolo, 2007). Examples of such an enquiry or struggle would be Anzaldúa's 'border thinking' or the Zapatista's geopolitical and epistemic revolution in Chiapas (Grosfoguel, 2008). Mignolo's (2000) critical border thinking is a tool to recognise and transform the hegemonic imaginary of the Eurocentric project of modernity from the perspectives of subalternised peoples, such as the Zapatistas, chicana/os, racialised and minoritized peoples anywhere (Mignolo, 2011a).¹⁷ In that sense, modern categories (democracy, citizenship, emancipation,

¹⁷ See Mignolo (2002) for an analysis of the Zapatista's understanding of governance, grounded in Tojolab'al epistemologies and a linguistics of intersubjectivities (in contrast to subject/object hierarchies).

etc.) mustn't necessarily be rejected (Dussel, 2002), but redefined from the ontological and epistemological view of the subaltern.

The MC discourse's analytical strengths lie in moving the project of decolonisation beyond the political and economic dependency of peripheral countries. Its authors question the universal validity of ways of knowing that are based on the three "macro-narratives" or pillars of modernity: Christian theology, secular philosophy and scientific (instrumental) reason (Suša, 2016). Furthermore, its strength lies in its programmatic call for "de-linking". De-linking involves the specific articulation of other ways of knowing and being, which is the focus of this thesis with regards to degrowth. MC's chief concern lies with epistemological decolonisation, that is, decentring Western-scientific methods of knowledge production, binary and heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality, the nation state etc. (Escobar, 2010; Fabbri, 2014; Lugones et al., 2008; Sanjinés, 2007; Schiwy, 2007; Walsh, 2007). In economic terms, de-linking requires the production of logics and modes of production that decentre the economic rationality and mathematical reasoning in favour of socioecological wellbeing. The Community Solidarity Economy, central proposal of the Ecuadorian indigenous movements and oriented towards *sumak kawsay* (*Buen Vivir*, or Good Living) represents such a logic. Chapter Seven argues that the contexts in which I have observed the political economy of *Buen Vivir* produce psychological wellbeing through relational justice. This is achieved through framing the economy around spiritual and material wellbeing, while satisfying basic needs.

This thesis interacts with social sciences produced by indigenous and non-indigenous scholars in Latin America. Through the *Buen Vivir* case study, it also engages with decolonising practice (see Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012). In that sense, it complements the theoretical efforts of MC scholarship by engaging with indigenous contributions, activism and theories from Ecuador. The case study centres the lived experiences of Ecuadorian communities that are struggling against their own, historically and culturally specific CMoP. Furthermore, I employ MC analyses throughout this thesis not as a dogmatic set of prescriptions, but a decolonial approach to other disciplines, theories or practices. The arguments made through the MC lens therefore do not pivot a “Western”, degrowth culture against a “non-Western” culture. Instead, its analytical focus allows me to draw out those epistemic presumptions and ontological categories that reinforce Eurocentrism within degrowth, and that obstruct analyses using relational approaches to human and non-human wellbeing.

Lastly, MC as social theory points towards decolonial pathways without indoctrination. Its critique of the colonial world system aims to dismantle the epistemic privileges uncovered by MC analysis. Rather than proposing a single solution, MC recognises and foregrounds the pluriverse of ideas contained within every community’s struggle against the CMoP. Therefore, and for the purposes of this analysis, the presented criticisms of MC scholarship do not detract from its analytical strengths of highlighting systemic structures of domination, both in theory and practice. The MC discourse represents a useful tool in uncovering how modernity, and by extension, aspects of the CMoP continue to be embedded in degrowth.

The next two parts of this subsection introduce those theoretical constructs from the CMoP that are relevant to the central arguments of this thesis. Chapter Seven uses the coloniality of gender as analytical approach to the gender politics of *Buen Vivir*. The coloniality of nature is this chapter's analytical tool for provincialising degrowth's conceptualisation of nature. In order to apply these two frameworks to *Buen Vivir* and degrowth, the following paragraphs operationalise them in more details. I start with the coloniality of gender.

Coloniality of Gender

Given the concept's relevance to the empirical chapters, it will be necessary to briefly examine the coloniality of gender in the historical context of Latin America.

The coloniality of gender framework moves away from centring patriarchy as a universal structure of oppression and lens through which to analyse gender.

Amongst others, Lugones (2007) instead looks towards the interaction of gender and sexuality with race and class to assert that colonialism produced different, oppressive gender regimes for the colonised. According to her, the coloniality of power, that is, the logic of domination, is the category of analysis through which to understand domination, including hierarchical gender and sexuality systems, rather than gender itself (Ibid). Crucially, what Lugones calls the "modern/colonial gender system", consisting of biological dimorphism, and patriarchal and heterosexual organisation of relations, subjects *both* men and women of colour "in all domains of existence", along racial lines (2007). For Lozano L. (2019, pp. 58–59), this understanding of gender and coloniality, or rather, the *coloniality of gender*, commands that the violence against black women in the Colombian Pacific region is a result of industrial development, extraction, privatisation and

resulting paramilitary activity, in other words, a function of the hegemonic development model, as well as a deterritorialization strategy.

Decolonial Feminisms therefore trace a connection between the exploitation of female bodies and territory. On the one hand, the conceptualisation of body(-as-)territory poses an epistemological challenge to the modern/colonial separation of mind and body. On the other hand, it's a methodological tool to process and analyse the colonial invasion of the original territories of the Americas and its time-space (Pachamama), the first steps of which are argued to have been the violations of indigenous women (Paredes, 2017). Controlling the bodies of indigenous and black women through sexual violence indicated possession and territorial control of the colonised. The construction of the body of indigenous women as territory has been part of the etymology of colonisation from the 15th century onwards, and is argued to continue today through accumulation by dispossession (Smith, 2005 and Harvey, 2003 in Castillo, 2017, pp. 36–37).

Body-territory is therefore a way to integrate bodies and place into (feminist) analyses, both of which are often disregarded in public policy analyses and narratives of progress and modernity. In relation to BV, it's a methodology that challenges the coloniality of gender, and therefore opens up decolonial pathways.

Segato (2014, see Figure 5.1) argues that in Latin America, coloniality has turned an ancestral gender system based on complementary duality into a hierarchical binary characteristic of modernity/coloniality. Abya Yala, which comes from the Kuna language, is the name given to the Latin American continent by its indigenous peoples (Arias, 2018).

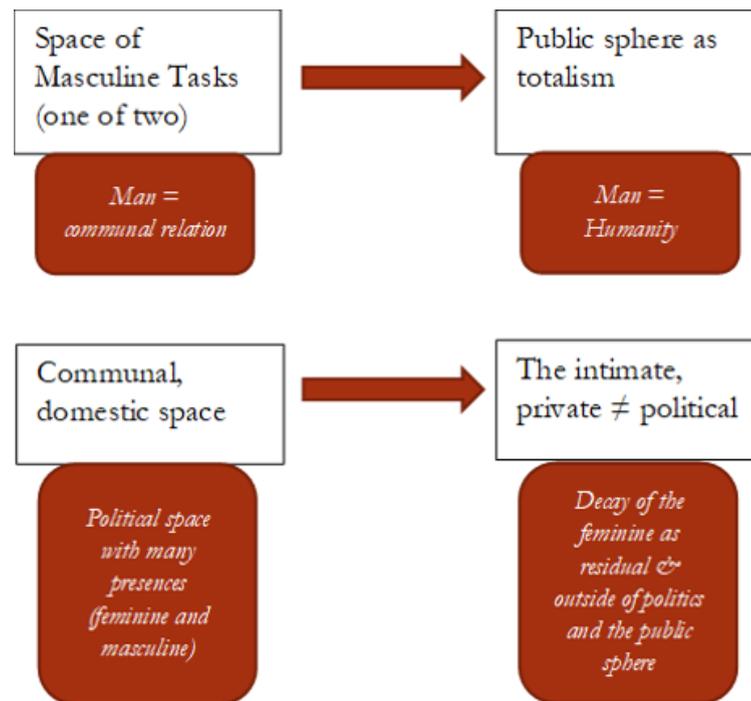


Fig. 5.1 The coloniality of gender: the effect of colonialism on gender conceptualisations in Abya Yala

Elaborated following Segato (Segato, 2014; 2019, p. 39). The left-hand figures represent ancestral gender configurations, the right-hand figures represent the modern/colonial gender binaries.

Arguably, colonialism and the postcolonial state were only able to re-structure territories and land as republics and borders after expropriating the female body (or body-territory; Cabnal, 2012). In pre-colonial eras, the private was conceived as a political space, although it is not clear to what extents precolonial patriarchy also shaped this political space. Segato argues that colonial conquest transformed this space into an apolitical, individual arena (2014, see Figure 5.1). Indigenous, peasant, and black women in colonial and postcolonial Latin America lost their political subject and personhood through an overwhelming combination of physical and political violence. These (ongoing) processes have been theorised by decolonial feminists across Latin America, whose analyses depart from the coloniality of gender framework to varying extents, as well as complement it.

Decolonial feminists have challenged their subalternisation by hegemonic/liberal feminism from the intersection of race, class and gender (Zaragocin and Varea, 2017, pp. 20–21). Chapter Seven’s analytical framework for the discussion of *Buen Vivir* (BV) and gender draws on the decolonial feminisms that have been produced in Latin America over the last decades, and that to varying degrees interact with BV. These centre the lives and experiences, and ontology and epistemologies of indigenous, Black/Afro-descendant, peasant, mestizo, lesbian and non-binary women and communities. Following the methodology laid out in Chapter One, Abya Yala is considered a space from which epistemic changes in analysing oppression and politics are produced (cf. Zaragocin, 2017). Indigenous, communitarian, black and queer feminisms aim to “displace the Western rationality and hegemonic discourse of white, Euro-centred feminism and the unitary category of *woman*” (Lozano L., in Walsh, 2018b, p. 39). To do so, they challenge the intersections of the coloniality of power beyond gender to interrogate race, class, sexuality and ethnicity. Decolonial feminisms analyse coloniality and racism not as social phenomena, but epistemologies that are intrinsic to modernity and its fallacy of ‘liberation’ (Miñoso et al., 2014, p. 32). As such, modern/colonial feminism has both defined the category of woman (white, middle-class, heterosexual) as well as what her subordination and subsequent (bourgeois, individual, heteronormative) liberation look like; namely, the transformation of woman into *homo economicus* as relief from poverty and violence (Fernández and Santillana, 2019; Lozano L., 2014, p. 335). Rather than abandoning the categories of gender and woman, decolonial feminisms aim to redefine and contextualise those categories for local contexts and struggles.

In contrast to liberal feminists, indigenous and Black feminists centre and consolidate their feminisms within collective rights struggles (Lozano L., 2014, p. 348). Their struggles, however, are often marginalised within these collective ones (Castillo, 2017, p. 33). Most importantly for this research, decolonial feminisms inextricably link women's rights to the defence of territory and nature as spaces for the reproduction of life, and to the defence of community as space for the reproduction of locally contingent economic practices, culture and identity (Castillo, 2017; Lozano L., 2014, p. 348; Rojas et al., 2015; Zaragocin, 2017). In this regard, their relevance for discussions on BV are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Communitarian feminists argue that women in the pre-Columbian era had access to land, their own rituals relating to the moon, and (medicinal) control over their own and their children's bodies (Paredes, 2017). The ancestral duality of *chacha-warmi* (man-woman) is an expression of a cosmic and political duality. Rather than opposing binaries, this duality is non-hierarchical and relational and produces a community.¹⁸ This isn't to say that the precolonial gender system wasn't patriarchal, but that patriarchy imported from Europe has exacerbated the existing, precolonial patriarchy across Central and South America.

According to Lorena Cabnal (2012), this ancestral patriarchy manifested itself in wars between different indigenous peoples, violence and imperialism, that is, the act of *ruling over others*. These acts are inscribed in temples and monuments as well as the delivery of women to warriors, castes and the governing classes. Today,

¹⁸ According to communitarian feminists, the man-women duality isn't an expression of obligatory heterosexuality or family relations, but of multidimensional, political actors who both construct their own autonomous identities and in doing so produce a community in which none is subsumed by the other (Cabnal, 2012, p. 14).

the ancestral patriarchy manifests itself in the perceived right to hit disobedient women, dowries or arranged marriages (Ibid). Colonial penetration thus refunctioned and strengthened ancestral patriarchy through alliances and complicities between colonisers and indigenous men, creating interlinking patriarchies (*entronque patriarcal*, Paredes, 2017; Cabnal, 2012). The *entronque patriarcal* differs from Segato’s arguments, which consider the imposition of the modern/colonial gender system onto existing dual ones.¹⁹

Communitarian feminisms then attempt to recover ancestral memories of duality and complementarity without “rescuing” or romanticising a precolonial, patriarchal past (Cabnal, 2012). Paredes (2014, p. 85) reconceptualises the ancestral duality of *chacha-warmi* (man-woman) to *warmi-chacha* (woman-man) to recuperate a horizontal, non-hierarchical complementarity between genders. She aims to “begin the time of women (*warmi-pacha*) [woman-time] departing from the women in the community of *warmi-chacha* [woman-man]”. Figure 5.2 visualises the horizontal complementarity envisioned by Paredes:

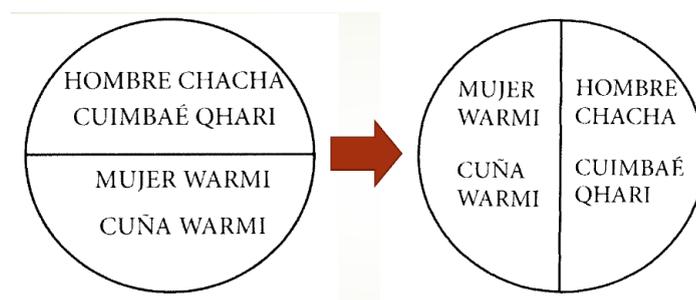


Fig. 5.2 Proposed re-configuration of the dual gender hierarchy currently lived in many indigenous communities

As proposed by Julieta Paredes. This transformation aims to reconfigure an exploitative and oppressive complementarity-turned-binary into a

¹⁹ I would like to thank Larissa Da Silva Araujo for sharing her expertise on this topic with me.

complementarity of equal pairs in horizontal, non-hierarchical and community-building relationship (Paredes, 2014, pp. 83–84).

This “community of communities” is to be constructed outside the republican bourgeois and modern/colonial nation state in an attempt to search for organising forms that deliver wellbeing for all of humanity (Paredes, 2014, p. 120). There is a general consensus among decolonial feminists that the modern/colonial nation state functions as the DNA of patriarchy (and racism), since the republics were founded without the abolition of either slavery or servitude (Vega, 2019, p. 43). Moreover, they consider patriarchy as functional to capitalism. Like eco-feminists, decolonial feminists argue that *capitalism needs patriarchy* in order to sustain itself (Ibid, p. 32). In order to dismantle patriarchy, one must first dismantle capitalism. The dismantling of capitalism, however, commands a task of inconceivable magnitude by all revolutionaries to date, which is the reason they have failed (Ibid). While this is not the space to discuss possible exceptions (Rojava, the Zapatistas, Cuba, Vietnam, and so on), nor to engage in a thorough historical analysis of the feminist potential behind those revolutions which were defeated militarily (Chile’s Allende, the second Spanish Republic), the link between capitalism and patriarchy is both historical and contemporary. Chapter Seven analyses implications of the sexual division of labour’s reinforcement under the Correa and Moreno governments in Ecuador for the gender politics of *Buen Vivir*.

Coloniality of Nature

To lay the theoretical groundwork for a provincialisation of nature within degrowth, the following paragraphs define ‘coloniality of nature’. Table 5.1 presented the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMoP). Within the CMoP, nature is

configured as separate axis over which the logic of colonialism is exerted, both via economic and epistemic regimes. The previous subsection also alluded to the fact that the CMoP initially did not include nature as separate axis, or category. From a traditional Marxist standpoint, the coloniality of nature would have been located between the control of authority and economy, referring to resource appropriation and exploitation (Mignolo and Carballo, 2014, p. 133). However, since the 1990s, indigenous, Afro-Latino and other social movements and related philosophical proposals across Latin America have been contesting the categories that frame being and knowing in the modern/colonial world. This includes the nature/culture binary that arguably facilitates extractive policies and development. It is chiefly characterised by an anthropocentric view of the world. Accordingly, in the early 2000s, Edgardo Lander worked to integrate nature into a Marxist analysis. He argued that integrating nature as a key component and material basis of the international division of labour situates capitalism within global subaltern territories. Lander would also frame its development as a global, rather than exclusively European process (2000b, pp. 35–37). Nature thereby eventually became a separate axis of the CMoP, albeit less well developed compared to either the coloniality of gender or economy. He (2019, pp. 14–15) identified nature’s anthropocentric conceptualisation as one of the civilisational patterns that produce and exacerbate the so-called civilisational crisis.

The civilisational crisis approach, as laid out in the introduction, represents a systemic approach to the current multiple crises. It criticises, amongst others, the hegemonic, scientific knowledge system’s reliance on hierarchical binaries

(nature/culture, woman/man, society/economy etc., see Mignolo and Carballo, 2014, pp. 30–33). These preclude the acknowledgment of non-scientific knowledge as valid, and facilitate the exploitation of nature as resource (Lander, 2019, p. 15, 2000b, p. 15). The coloniality of nature is therefore argued to be based on an “ontological rift” (after Charles Taylor, in Lander, 2000b, p. 15) in the modern/colonial world. The separation of reason from the world (and body) produces a disembodied and decontextualised body of knowledge, while simultaneously codifying its pretension to objectivity and universality (Lander, 2000b, p. 15). This ontological rift assigns nature a passive, object status and reproduces colonial difference, a “hierarchy and a power differential” (Mignolo, 2018, p. 179). The colonial difference of nature, created through colonial power over people, territories and flora and fauna (or biopower, in the Foucauldian tradition), describes the domination of the view of nature as resource over other, non-binary conceptualisations of nature.

Coloniality of nature therefore encapsulates not only a supposed, and ultimately false, modern ontological divide between nature and culture (Latour, 1993), but also an epistemological separation. While nature and natural spaces are colonised by industrial and extractive activity, the *coloniality of nature* goes beyond that meaning. It refers to the construction of hegemonizing and excluding discourses about who has the right to know and to exploit, and who has the right to protect and safeguard nature (Achinte and Rosero, 2016). Therefore, nature in the secular European sense, that is, primarily a resource for industrial development, is argued to be a Western “epistemic fiction” that helps to construct the ontological entities called Nature and Culture (Mignolo and Carballo, 2014, pp. 30–33). These

“representation regimes” (Escobar, 1999, 2007 in Achinte and Rosero, 2016) combine with the “triad of economy, science and technology” to foreclose certain epistemic and political struggles about ways of relating to nature (Achinte and Rosero, 2016). In this sense, the scientific community considers modern science, and with it, the dualist construction of nature, to comprise “objective, value-free, and context-free knowledge of the external world” (Merchant, 2020, p. 382). In contrast, the concept ‘coloniality of nature’ poses a challenge to this idea, and postulates that knowledge, including that of nature, is always context-dependent, local, and embedded into the human world.

Coloniality of nature therefore also refers to the imposition of a knowledge system that subjugates both nature and culture to totalising logics and economic rationalities, for instance to those of growth and development (Escobar, 2000, p. 126). Under these logics, nature becomes commodified and colonised. This process is mediated by industrial and academic knowledge production that does away with nature itself and those forms of being and acting that are experienced outside Eurocentric rationality (Achinte and Rosero, 2016). Coloniality of nature affects biophysical, sociocultural and territorial configurations, since extractive industry also leads to loss of ancestral knowledge (Achinte and Rosero, 2016; Alimonda, 2011, p. 22). Social movements, thinkers and activists across Latin America have been articulating proposals on how to decolonise the secular European idea of nature – both theoretically and in practice.

One of the most influential Latin American challenges to the nature/culture binary and development comes from indigenous philosophy and practice. The

constitutional enshrinement of Buen Vivir as right to Good Living in Ecuador challenges the subordination of nature to economic activity (Ecuador Const., 2008, pt. II, arts. 12–34, amongst others). Its grassroots politics and related cultural practices (re-)articulate a relational ontology that awards agency and subject status to non-human nature. Chapter Seven examines this proposal and political project in detail. In addition to *Buen Vivir*, Escobar's (2000, p. 126) ethnography of social movements in the Colombian Pacific highlights how activists and groups represent their own political visions of place, nature and culture against the hegemony of growth and development. Examples of the social movements' political ecology are concepts such as territory-regions or the notion of biodiversity as *territory plus culture* (Ibid, p. 131-132). The creation of these political projects and epistemic representations resists the (epistemic) coloniality of nature, although political power often continues to reside with central government and the extractive industries it facilitates (see for example Vélez-Torres, 2014). Nevertheless, identifying the logic of coloniality in our relations with nature is also decolonial work (Mignolo and Carballo, 2014, p. 133), said to stimulate thinking about the "epistemic dimension" of nature beyond its use, consumption and conservation (Achinte and Rosero, 2016). Decolonial thinkers have identified three steps towards decolonising, or provincialising nature: recognition, recovery, and decolonisation.

The first step lies in the recognition that 'nature' in its predominant conceptualisation refers to the post-Renaissance secular European idea of nature as resource (Mignolo and Carballo, 2014, pp. 30–33). Second, and congruent with demands made by degrowth and Buen Vivir, to decolonise nature is to recover life

in plenitude that breaks with the doctrine of economic growth (Ibid). Achinte and Rosero (2016) add a third step, which is the praxis of decolonising, or provincialising nature. The practice of “denaturalising” nature means allowing it to become a place for all forms of life without exception, in line with the notions of interculturality and plurinationality (central to Buen Vivir, see Chapters Six and Seven). In that sense, enabling the flourishing of non-economistic relationships with nature would act as a guarantee for safeguarding a sustainable future in the Anthropocene. According to Achinte and Rosero (2016), an intercultural dialogue has the potential to end nature’s status as a resource and convert it instead into a rights bearer. This thesis attempts to construct such an intercultural dialogue with respect to degrowth and Buen Vivir.

To conclude, the coloniality of nature can be summed up by the contemporary political and economic configurations that subject it to market interests on the one hand, and by epistemological configurations that privilege a scientific-technological way of knowing, utilising, and protecting nature over others. In exposing the European secular idea of nature as an “epistemic fiction”, the notion acknowledges that “we have never been modern” (Latour, 1993). In other words, coloniality of nature means that the analytical, ontological and epistemic separation of nature from culture has necessarily been a social-scientific construct with economic and political consequences (Ibid), but also that these consequences are embedded within colonial power relations. In the next main section, I uncover this epistemic fiction’s origins in early modern Europe in order to critically interrogate the ontology of degrowth. I characterise the latter as anthropocentric and economistic. I will show that degrowth *scientifique* relies on

binary, hierarchical constructs of nature. Historically, their emergence has been entangled with violent internal and external colonial processes in Europe, as the next main section goes on to show. This chapter's third main section articulates cultural and political alternatives to degrowth's anthropocentric ontology before I conclude the chapter by making the case for a living world.

5.2. The Ontology of Degrowth

Degrowth proposes a change in the economic system. In this chapter, I argue that to do so, degrowth, and above all, its embeddedness and investment in coloniality, must be historicised and provincialised. Initial absence of discussions of colonialism, and its gendered, racial and ecological effects have come to shape degrowth's Eurocentric focus. Towards the end of the 2010s, efforts were made to decentre Europe in degrowth analyses (Domazet and Ančić, 2019; Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019; Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2019). This main section explicitly addresses a gap in those efforts with regards to the ontology of degrowth.

Specifically, I present an evaluation of, and alternatives to, degrowth's conceptualisation of nature. I argue that degrowth *scientifique* inadvertently perpetuates the coloniality of nature by reproducing mechanistic, anthropocentric discourses on the environment.

I aim to "provincialise nature" (Coletta and Raftopoulos, 2016), or expose as culturally specific a concept that has been universalised by Western science and colonialism (Chakrabarty, 2000). The preceding main section demonstrated the cultural provinciality of the supposed universal dualism between nature and culture, as well as its role in sanctioning extractive, unequal, relations of ecological

exchange between Global North and South. As such, this main section delivers an ontological critique of degrowth. It examines the assumptions that shape degrowth policy and practice, limiting its place of relevance to Europe and the Euro-Atlantic world.

Table 5.2 briefly recaps the central tenets of degrowth, as laid out in Chapter Two. It illustrates the intellectual diversity of degrowth’s threefold growth analysis.

Growth analysis	Intellectual foundations
<i>Ecological</i> critique of growth	ecological economics; physics (thermodynamics)
<i>Cultural</i> critique of growth	sociological, anthropological, psychoanalytical, and anti-utilitarian critiques of <i>homo economicus</i> ; social limits to growth
<i>Political</i> critique of growth	political ecology; post-development

Table 5.2 Degrowth’s threefold analysis of growth and intellectual foundations

This analysis examines the ways in which degrowth’s *ecological* growth analysis constructs and categorises nature as separate from culture. A systematic analysis of how the coloniality of nature is built into cultural and political growth critiques would go beyond the scope of this chapter. Others (e.g. Paulson, 2014, p. 46) have already argued that degrowth’s *political* growth critique is founded on structuralist, anthropocentric discourses on the environment. In addition, ontological analyses of degrowth politics and activism have been restricted to *cultural* growth critiques (Brown, 2018; Demmer and Hummel, 2017).

Consequently, this main section investigates some of the ontological assumptions

behind degrowth's *ecological* growth analysis through the lens of the modernity/coloniality's historical approach and history of science.

This subsection represents an innovative effort to historicise and provincialise the conceptualisation of nature within degrowth. In the first part, I historicise degrowth by sketching the origins of the coloniality of nature in the natural sciences and 'imperial discoveries' of the Western colonial powers. In the second part, I provincialise degrowth by demonstrating how its ecological growth analysis draws on the natural sciences' underlying nature/culture dualism. In main section '5.3. Cultural and Political alternatives to Coloniality of Nature', I articulate cultural and political alternatives.

5.2.1. A Colonial History of Nature

This subsection concerns changes in European cosmology from the 16th to the 20th century, and accompanying impacts on dominant conceptualisations of nature. I argue that science-driven changes in European cosmology, from natural philosophy, vitalism and divine providentialism, towards mechanistic, measurable and law-governed ideas of knowledge and being, led to changes in conceptualisation of nature. Following the seminal work of Carolyn Merchant (2020), I argue that the development of early merchant capitalism drove a change in European cosmology from a conceptualisation of nature as living, female nurturer in the 15th and 16th centuries, toward the view of nature as dead, inert matter in the 18th and 19th centuries. In cultural and economic terms, this transition sanctioned the exploitation of nature as resource – and people classified as such. Merchant's text is a pivotal, eco-feminist contribution to the history of

science, focussing on European scientific development. This thesis begins with the argument that modernity is not a result of endogenous European, exceptional development, but instead ought to be considered as a confluence of violent and non-violent²⁰ interactions with the non-European world. As such, Merchant's analysis is complemented by combining her work with a post- and decolonial analysis that draws on the modernity/coloniality discourse explored in the previous subsection.

The present subsection also relies on Bentley Allan's (2018) work on scientific cosmologies and international orders, which complements Merchant's cultural and political analysis at the supranational level. Amongst other documents, he draws on discourse analyses of international treaties and delegate reports from the Vienna and Berlin Congresses, as well as World Bank documents, to demonstrate that cosmological ideas from science drove structural changes and reconfigured state purposes. Examples are the 18th century, mechanistic balance of power discourse, inspired by Newton and Descartes, which gave way to civilisational discourses loosely based on Darwin's ideas during the imperial competitions of the 19th century. These culminate in the emergence of the (economic) growth imperative in the mid-20th century. Institutional changes, driven by changes in the natural and economic sciences, result in the representation of nature as an object that can be known, represented and controlled through statistical tables and mathematical models (Allan, 2018, p. 260), as this subsection will go on to show.

²⁰ For an example of a (physically) non-violent exchange between indigenous and European thought that is argued to have had one of the most profound impacts on early modern European political theory, see Graeber and Wengrow (2019).

Limits and Cosmology

In political economy terms, I conceptualise this 500-year cosmological change as a transition from cosmological limits, that is, limits that stem from the ways in which humans conceptualise nature and their role in the universe, to the 20th century paradigm of unlimited growth. Following Merchant, I argue that the view of the world as an organism placed limits on environmental exploitation because nature was seen as a living, nurturing mother. From the 17th century onwards, scientific progress shifted the view of the cosmos from organism to mechanism, which in turn provided the justification for exerting power and dominion of nature (Merchant, 2020, pp. 278, 286). I argue that this transition paved the way for the growth paradigm, which denies ecological, social or physical limits to growth (see Chapter Two; and Allan, 2018, chap. 5). The concept of ‘cosmological limits to growth’ is taken up again in Chapters Seven and Eight of this thesis. The following paragraphs first define ‘cosmology’; and second, elaborate on the idea of cosmological limits to growth.

First, Allan’s work provides a useful conceptualisation of the term cosmology geared towards the social sciences, which I will adapt for the purpose of this thesis. Following Allan (2018, p. 11), cosmology is hereby used as a shorthand to refer to dominant understandings of ontology, epistemology, temporality, cosmogony, and the role or place of humans in the universe, characteristic to a specific society in a given time and place. In Allan’s account, the understanding of nature is intimately tied to fundamental categories of being, knowledge production, understanding of the direction of time, the origins of the universe, and human destiny. The word “cosmovision” (*cosmovisión* in Spanish) was brought

to Latin America during the colonial period, and is used by some indigenous and non-indigenous scholars today to juxtapose indigenous worldviews with European philosophy, knowledge etc. – a distinction that for some perpetuates the colonial connotation of the term (Waldmüller, 2014). In this thesis, I will use the term ‘cosmology’, as defined in this paragraph, to refer to both European and non-European worldviews. The change from living Earth to inanimate mechanism also coincided with the rise of European colonialism, and nature’s and non-Western (indigenous) peoples’ treatment as Other, as the following part ‘Religion, science and coloniality of nature’ will show.

Second, degrowth articulates an ecological analysis of economic growth based on ecological economics. Amongst others, this is centred on the recognition of ‘hard’ limits to human development. These hard limits are epitomised in the ‘planetary boundaries’ concept (W. Steffen et al., 2015). Unanimously accepted in environmental literature, *external limits* are paramount to guiding policy and climate action. However, lack of political progress in fighting ecological breakdown and depoliticization of ‘planetary boundaries’ has prompted Kallis (2019) to argue for prioritising *internal limits*. Based on ideas from Castoriadis, Kallis suggests that these would arise from excess-restraining morals of self-limitation within autonomous societies (Ibid, p. 55). Many global religious and philosophical traditions also advise material frugality and self-restraint: Stoicism, Buddhism, Sufism, Puritanism, and so on. Self-limitation, however, has invited criticism from ecological economists for its overtly constructivist framing of limits (Gómez-Baggethun, 2020b). To avoid the juxtaposition of constructed vs. ‘real’, or external vs. internal limits, I suggest a third notion: *cosmological limits to growth*. I

define these as normative constraints to the destruction of the living world. Cosmological limits to growth are inherent in worldviews that are based on connectedness to nature. These worldviews can be found in pre-capitalist European cosmology (see Merchant, 2020), as well as contemporary Andean practices surrounding *Buen Vivir*/sumak kawsay, explored in Chapter Seven.

In other words, 'cosmological limits to growth' refers to limits set by a relational cosmology that embed humans within a living Earth, rather than placing humankind above dead matter or inert materials (see 'Fig. 5.3 The Great Chain of Being (Lull, 1753, p. 12)'). This approach to limits would safeguard planetary boundaries while creating political instruments capable of changing our view of nature towards one of a live agent or subject, as I explore in '5.3.1. The Living World'. In practice, cosmological limits can be enshrined by granting legal personhood to nature, explored in '5.3.3. Rights of Nature'. 'Cosmological limits to growth' recognises that while 'limits' are both socially constructed and physically present, the embeddedness of humans within nature places limits on growth before socio-ecological ones are breached. Chapter Seven demonstrates such embeddedness in practice.

A worldview in which nature is alive and has agency is antithetical to the nature/culture divide prevalent in degrowth's ecological growth analysis. The following subsection, '5.2.2. Degrowth Coloniality of Nature', elaborates on this claim. 'Cosmological limits to growth' therefore provide impetus to discussions around cultural direction of degrowth processes beyond socioeconomic transitions. Chapters Seven and Eight substantiate these arguments in relation to

Buen Vivir and degrowth. The following pages trace the genesis of the “dead earth worldview” (Shiva, 2013). In other words, it gives a colonial history of nature by tracing scientific, religious and economic developments.

Religion, science and coloniality of nature

The modernity/coloniality lens suggests that the 16th century scientific revolution laid the foundation for our current civilisational crisis. It culminated in the three “imperial discoveries” of “nature”, the Orient(al) and the ‘savage’ as profitable resources and economic inputs (Lander, 2018, pp. 48–50; Mignolo and Carballo, 2014, p. 31; Santos, 2006, p. 125). The *combination* of social and environmental exploitation – appropriating tropical nature through forced labour – provided the capital and resources required to build the foundations of capitalist modernity (Coronil, 2000, p. 55). The development of the pillars of the industrial revolution – the steam engine and the banking, insurance and heavy industries – was enabled by the extraction of silver and gold and the cultivation of sugar, tobacco, cotton and other natural resources (Mignolo and Carballo, 2014, p. 28; Williams, 1944, chap. 5). The secularisation of European cosmology from the 16th century onwards therefore accompanied, enabled, and perhaps even justified the process that has been conceptualised in the preceding subsection as ‘coloniality of nature’.

Prior and during the processes of secularisation, its stark indifference towards the exploitation and destruction of the natural world positioned Christianity as the foremost, anthropocentric, world religion. The Old Testament’s interpretation of the desert as a desolate wilderness to which post-Eden humanity was banished allowed John Locke, John Calvin and the Puritans to declare that God sanctioned

man's dominion over nature (Merchant, 2020, p. 192). They thereby exacerbated existing trends in medieval Christianity.

In addition to replacing pagan animism²¹, Christian doctrines set humans not just *apart* from, but *above* nature by offering its dominion to man made in *God's* image (White, 1968, pp. 85–88). The so-called White thesis has the potential to add a religious component or axis to the CMoP. In their work, MC authors generally do not pay close attention to the role of Christianity, especially Catholicism, in supporting the colonisation of the Americas, nor its subsequent influence in shaping and maintaining the coloniality of gender, or, as suggested here, that of nature.²² The hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being (Figure 5.3) illustrates medieval Christianity's elevation of humans above animals and plants, which represents an early step towards the hierarchical dualism that would later separate nature from culture, subordinating the former to the latter in cultural, political and economic matters.

²¹ The 8th century felling of Donar's oak, a sacred Germanic tree by Saint Boniface is an example of some of the symbolic violence surrounding this process. The act meant "to demonstrate the impotence of the traditional ancestral gods" (Schieffer, 2020, p. 15). The tree's wood was used to build a church.

²² One possible explanation might be the influence of liberation theology during the 1960s in Latin America, and ongoing importance of some religious movements in supporting left-wing struggles. On the other hand, the growing influence of evangelism, in particular in Brazil, in combination with Catholic Church institutions are fuelling a conservative backlash to social rights across Latin America (Vega, 2019).

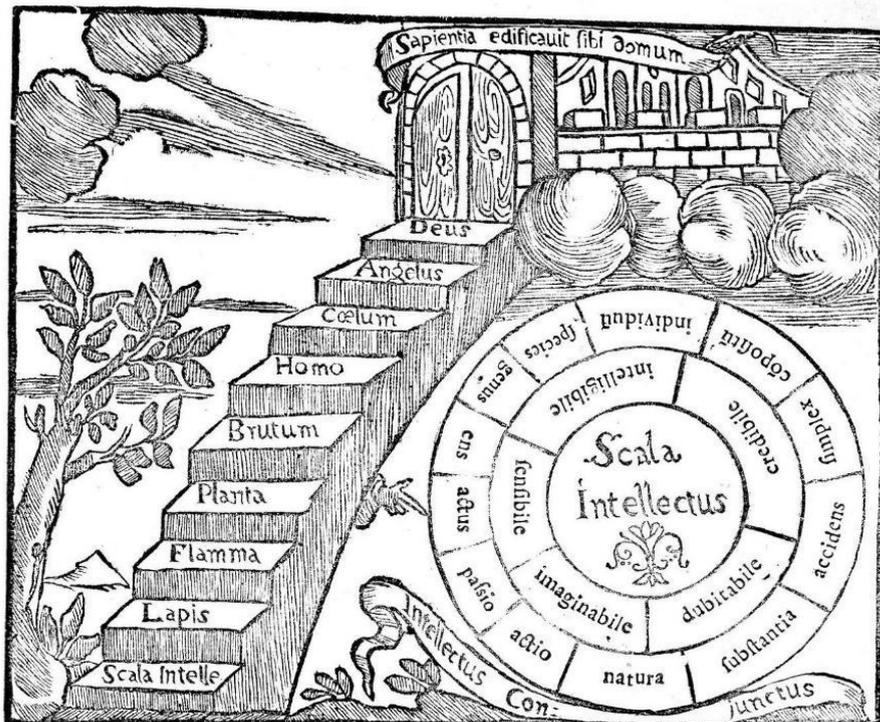


Fig. 5.3 The Great Chain of Being (Lull, 1753, p. 12)

Historically, the White thesis sits alongside Christian environmental thought. The Diggers (Hessayon, 2008), Benedictine and Franciscan orders (Dubos, 2006), as well as Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* (2016) have articulated various forms of environmentalism. Contemporary biblical beliefs furthermore do not seem to translate into low environmental concerns (Hitzhusen, 2007). Yet, the interaction between science and religion from the 16th century onwards resulted in marginalisation of those Christian interpretations that sought to interpret Genesis as harmonic relationship with, instead of rule over, nature (Montuschi, 2010). Here, Allan and Merchant's work on the role of science in changing culture and politics is useful in illustrating the transition from a cosmology based on equilibrium to dominion over nature.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, art, philosophy, literature and sciences oscillated between representing nature with the competing images of organism and mechanism. Pre-capitalist, early modern indigenous European cosmology considered nature to be an immanent agent of God and his laws in the world (Merchant, 2020, pp. 37, 155). The cosmos was perceived as a hierarchical, interconnected organism permeated by vital life forces, down to the lowliest stone (Allan, 2018, p. 91; *ibid*). Informal modes of knowledge production, such as bible studies or astrology were the dominant pre-Renaissance epistemologies but also sat alongside elemental naturalism and cyclical ideas of time (Allan, 2018, pp. 84–87). However, Renaissance philosophy and social contexts, such as Neoplatonic natural magic, in which the magus rearranges natural objects, configured changes towards the modern concentration of power and knowledge within individuals, rather than communities (Merchant, 2020, pp. 159–167). Copernican heliocentrism and Galilean astronomy produced images of the earth and celestial bodies in motion, which transformed fundamental beliefs about “matter, nature, and time” (Allan, 2018, pp. 90–92). The organicist framework was slowly subsumed by new images and discourses that underwrote a changing cosmology.

During the 17th century, natural philosophy reunified the cosmos, society and the self via a new metaphor of the machine (Merchant, 2020, p. 263). While this image decentred God in daily life, the universe came to be seen as infinite, created by an infinite God (Allan, 2018, p. 92). By the mid-17th century, mechanisation had subdued a female earth, and commercialisation, industrialisation and the domination metaphor had spread beyond the religious spheres to society and politics, ranging from enclosure and the eradication of the commons in England to

witch hunts and associated oppression of women in Europe (Federici, 2004; Merchant, 2020, pp. 37; Chapter 5). Society became a collection of individuals, replacing the image of an organism interlinked from the peasants to the monarch (Merchant, 2020, p. 145). The state was created in response to this mechanistic model of society, and philosophers like Thomas Hobbes presented its force and domination as the solution to disorder (Ibid, pp. 285–287).

The mechanical view of nature is now the accepted one in Western science, which represents matter as atoms, colours as reflection of light waves and the sun as the centre of the solar system (Merchant, 2020, p. 264). The removal of animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos is captured in Merchant's book title 'the Death of Nature', and is, according to her, one of the most far-reaching effects of the Scientific Revolution (Ibid). While the organic framework was embedded within a value system, with 'cosmological limits to growth', the managerial view of nature serves as a "subtle sanction for exploitation and manipulation of nature and its resources" (Ibid, pp. 41, 156). The modern, mechanistic view sees nature not as an organism, but disorder.

From the 17th century onwards, nature therefore had to be controlled, as did the witches who served as symbols of nature's violence (Merchant, 2020, p. 186).

During the Renaissance, new commercial activities such as mining in Saxony, Bohemia, or the Harz region were justified with new images of nature as a "wicked stepmother who hides and conceals the metals in her inner parts instead of making them available for human use" (Ibid, p. 74). The correlation between mining and digging into a woman's body became a dominant, sexualised image

during the 16th and 17th centuries (Ibid, p. 80). Following his observation of witch trials, Francis Bacon compared nature to a woman, who is “to be tortured through mechanical interventions” for human benefit (Ibid, p. 230–33). Indeed, the post-Eden loss of dominion over creation was believed to be recoverable through knowledge and experimental method (Ibid, p. 236). Dominion over women in turn was achieved through the “construction of a new patriarchal order” that excluded women from wage work and subordinated them to men (Federici, 2004, p. 12; see also Merchant, 2020, pp. 211–28). The transformation of the organic view of nature towards mechanism was accompanied by a changing image of nurturing nature into nature as a destructive force. As shown in detail by Merchant (2020, chaps. 6–7) and Federici (2009, 2004, chap. 2), the transition to early capitalism produced cultural changes in dominant conceptualisations of nature and oppressive changes in gender relations.

These new forms of control over cultural and social orders paralleled the perceived predictability of the behaviour of individual parts of the ‘machine’ (Merchant, *ibid*). This applied to both society and nature, both machines “governed by formal and efficient causes” (Allan, 2018, p. 92). In this new, secular world, power was derived from intervention through knowledge, which could be certain and consistent because the laws of nature were imposed on creation by God (see Descartes, 2003, pp. 105–112; Merchant, 2020, pp. 156, 264). Scientific discovery can directly translate and represent nature from an objective standpoint, for example through mathematical investigation, if nature is considered a machine (Allan, 2018, p. 93). Natural philosophy regarded mathematical investigation as primary, legitimate knowledge production (Ibid),

foreshadowing global imposition of this particular view of nature ('coloniality of nature').

Knowledge of natural laws therefore would enable men to become "the masters and possessors of nature" and through scientific enquiry and subsequent technological inventions improve the human condition (Descartes, 2006, p. 51; see also Bacon, in Scalercio, 2018). The scientific method, used to extract nature's secrets, replaced reverence for the earth as a nurturing, living organism and God's creation (Merchant, 2020, chaps. 7–10; Mignolo and Carballo, 2014, p. 30). The cosmological features of mechanism, therefore, are characterised by a materialist and mechanist ontology, a representational regime, a new concept of time as an absolute, open plane, and a redefinition of humans as "reasoning, knowing beings capable of building cumulative knowledge of the world" (Allan, 2018, p. 95). These cosmological ideas were then imported into political discourse by figures such as Francis Bacon or William Temple. The cosmology of mechanism laid the ground for later ideas about progress and growth.

The idea of actively 'improving' nature, people, and territory emerged slowly over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries and built on pre-capitalist colonial expansion within Europe.²³ The ontological and epistemological shifts introduced by natural philosophy resulted in the emergence of transnational statistics of populations, commerce, etc., which introduced quantitative principles to national

²³ During the expansion of Latin Christendom and the colonisation of the Celtic lands and Slavic areas East of the Elbe (*Ostsiedlung*) from the 10th to the 14th century, peasant settlement was encouraged by feudal lords who commanded the felling of woods and draining of marshes to obtain agricultural rents from cereal cultivation on such improved land (Bartlett, 1994, pp. 133–156). 17th and 18th century discourses on improvement differ in scale, application and geographic distribution, and are based on the scientific and cosmological principles of the time, discussed above. Neither Christianity nor cerealization could abolish animistic beliefs and traditions entirely.

and international politics (Allan, 2018, p. 108). During the 19th century, these were institutionalised within a Balance of Power framework, for instance at the Vienna and Berlin Conferences. This equilibrium was thought to be maintainable by rational, calculating statesmen who measure and manipulate variables of state power such as army size, financial reserves, etc. (Ibid). By the early 19th century, statistical laws superseded earlier deterministic ideas, and were taken to suggest that “deviant subpopulations” could be improved through “enumeration and classification” (Hacking, 1990, p. 3, cited in Allan, 2018, p. 117). This quantitative worldview cemented cosmological shifts towards viewing humans as masters of their world – control over which extends to both nature and people.

In Europe, the idea of improving, and perfecting, the shape and form of nature for human benefit was applied in both cultural and political settings. The ubiquitous geometric Renaissance and Baroque gardens are examples of ‘perfecting’ nature through imposing shape and form, rather than increasing top soils, for example (Montuschi, 2010; Steenbergen and Reh, 2003). In early 17th century coastal East England, the Fenlands drainage expelled subsistence farmers who had previously maintained the marshes’ ecological equilibrium. The newly created farmland was distributed to the landed gentry (Merchant, 2020, pp. 58, 99–104). Improving nature for human benefit was therefore embedded in processes of early capitalist accumulation, enclosure and internal colonialism. In terms of improving the human condition, scientific progress that allowed nature to be controlled, improved, and redistributed, strengthened the socioeconomic status of the middle and upper classes, to the detriment of farmers, journeymen, and later, workers (Lowith, 1966, pp. 155-156, in Jung, 1993; Merchant, 2020, p. 248). In the

overseas British colonial context, the mechanistic, controllable view of nature took on a similarly trajectory.

English settlement and colonisation of Ireland and Virginia mandated the “taming” of “wild” nature *and* people: “(t)he main problem facing the [Irish] landscape was the ‘wild and inhospitable people’” (travel writer Gerald cited in Pluymers, 2011). Similarly, “(c)hanges to descriptions of Virginia’s physical environment paralleled the changes in descriptions of Virginia’s natives” [Algonquians] (Rice, in Pluymers, 2011). As such, nature wasn’t necessarily constructed as an ontological entity *per se*. Rather, the transformation into plantation economies marked the colonies – wild nature – as fit for civil, that is, English habitation. Nature came to be regarded as the opposite of culture; inherently exterior to civilised Anglo-Saxon society (Mignolo and Carballo, 2014b, p. 30). Another example of the Baconian combination of knowledge of nature with power over it can be found in 16th and 17th century husbandry manuals, whose authors, “occasionally directly involved in colonial enterprises” (Pluymers, 2011), instructed prosperous landowners in both agricultural practices and management of serves and labourers.

With the advent of natural and social Darwinism during the 19th century, improvement and control became tied to notions of governmentality and civilisation. According to Allan (2018, pp. 136-37, 150-180), the British Colonial Office combined new evolutionary ideas from social and historical sciences with the idea of improvement into what he calls ‘evolutionary development’. Natural laws no longer determined a world in balance or harmony, but drove progressive, *civilisational* development through stages. These scientific developments directly

impacted British colonial policy, which shifted from non-interventionism towards a form of trusteeship for 'primitive' societies, to be guided towards Western standards (Allan, 2018, p. 177). Science was no longer means to the end of progress, but a marker of it and end in itself (Ibid, p. 180). While evolutionary development approaches were embedded in the League of Nations later on, the discourse shifted towards what Allan calls 'epistemic modernism' during the late 19th and early 20th century.

At the Berlin Conference in 1885, statistical knowledge was used to create new fields of study, or 'epistemic objects', such as forestry, nutrition, agriculture, labour etc. in order to divide colonial territory evenly among the European powers (Allan, 2018, p. 163). Colonialism therefore facilitated the creation of a new, 'object'-based epistemology and ontology (Ibid, p. 165), which divides the world, and knowledge itself, into self-contained entities. Nature itself was further divided into objects of study. Combining governance and science, 'epistemic modernism' describes the alliance of experts and state bureaucracy, considered capable of mapping and controlling the forces of both nature *and* societies (Ibid, p. 166). The League of Nation's tutelage system later introduced quantification mechanisms at supranational scale to classify and compare territories. On the one hand, this served to justify their colonial status and accompanying resource extraction by colonial powers. On the other hand, it cemented the status of 'the economy' as "a separate and specific object of knowledge" and produced governmental procedures and technical practices that were later taken up by the United Nations (Chatterjee, 2012, pp. 427–28). The tutelage system thus initialised economic

quantification processes, abstracting it from social and cultural processes, on a global scale.

In the second half of the 20th century, civilisational development discourses have largely given way to scientific-technological conceptualisations of development. In this context, economic growth became primary economic policy, overarching culture and (international) political purpose. It emerged from new, 20th century fields of enquiry within economic and management science that were based on systems-thinking and cybernetics (Allan, 2018, pp. 208–09, 217; Paulsson, 2019). This cosmological transformation builds on cosmological shifts introduced by the 18th and 19th century social and natural sciences, which represent the world as a series of modifiable, controllable, predictable, and manipulatable objects (Allan, 2018, p. 207-08). Cosmologically, economic growth thereby depends on an object-based ontology (e.g. 'economy'); mechanical systems thinking that theorises economic transactions and relations; statistics, tables, and models summarising transactions; an absolute, open, future-oriented plane of time to chart progress on; the notion that objects can grow and develop over time; and epistemic modernism with regards to economic policies and development (Ibid, p. 210). The latter is based on the three-fold modernist premise, developed over 300 hundred years of scientific progress, which mandates control over nature, social engineering, and scientific and technological progress for growth and prosperity (Ibid, p. 225). Overtly optimistic faith in knowledge and science currently sustains dominant, technocratic solutions to climate change and is essential for the idea of infinite economic growth (Allan, 2018, p. 261; Hickel and Kallis, 2019; see Chapters One and Two). In relation to humankind's place in the universe, the modernist

premise places humans above plants, animals, and even planetary climate systems.

Though quantum physics has challenged the mechanistic view of nature since the 20th century (Merchant, 2020, p. 29), the latter continues to be embedded in modern science, in particular economics. While economic, cultural and political histories of growth have been given elsewhere (Allan, 2018, chap. 5; Borowy and Schmelzer, 2017; Paulsson, 2019; Schmelzer, 2016), in this subsection I have highlighted that the economic growth paradigm depends on the scientific view of nature as predictable, controllable object. I have also shown how this view emerged from cosmological changes driven by the Scientific Revolution and the transition to capitalism. I have also embedded this process in colonialism and British colonial foreign policy, aspects of which were embedded in the 20th century international order.

I have so far argued that by the 19th century, anthropocentric mechanism in Europe had replaced much of the pre-Renaissance, organic view of a female nature who is alive and nurturing. This worldview acted as a normative constraint to environmental exploitation before the rise of merchant capitalism (Merchant, 2020, chap. 4). European indigenous cosmologies, previously grounded in sustainable forest, fens and soil management practices (Merchant, 2020, chap. 2) contained within them normative, *cosmological limits to growth*. The mechanistic worldview in turn has enabled, facilitated and produced the 'coloniality of nature' and represents an intensification of previous, Christian anthropocentrism. This chapter argued that the mechanistic conception of nature, separate from social

and political processes, represents the cultural and scientific foundation of the economic growth paradigm. A founding principle of modern political theory and neoclassical economics, in the following subsection I examine the extent to which it is built into degrowth theory and politics. In main section '5.3. Cultural and Political alternatives to Coloniality of Nature', I explore how degrowth might avoid building on this mechanistic conception of nature.

5.2.2. Degrowth Coloniality of Nature

The preceding account of the colonial history of nature has shown that the representation of nature as mechanism evolved to justify power and control over people, women and nature (Merchant, 2020, p. 291). The idea of nature as mechanism, external to and controllable by humankind is one of the key conditions "for the appropriation/exploitation that grounds the Western paradigm of unlimited growth" (Lander, 2002). Analysing nature as an indigenous European, universalised construct with colonial origins connects the acceleration of deforestation, oil and gas drilling, and mineral extractivism to the (infinite) economic growth imperative. To begin to provincialise nature within degrowth, this subsection examines how a mechanism and materialism are built into degrowth policy proposals.

Degrowth's central tenet is that humans are part of nature and that the economy is a sub-system of the wider ecosystem (cf. 'Fig. 2.1 Ecological Economics resituates the economy as a sub-system of ecosystems'). Given thermodynamic laws and current technological advancement, neither infinite economic growth, nor absolute decoupling of economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions or

resource use are feasible options (Hickel and Kallis, 2019). In articulating this ecological growth critique (cf. 'Table 5.2 Degrowth's threefold analysis of growth and intellectual foundations'), degrowth embeds humankind within nature, and highlights our dependence on it. As such, degrowth foregoes the stricter nature/culture dualism that neoclassical economics assumes, amongst other fields. However, in this precise aspect, that is, degrowth's ecological analysis of growth, the mechanist ontology that characterises dominant, colonial constructions of nature persists. This is because degrowth has inherited, and often uncritically adopted, the ontological assumptions and epistemology of ecological economics.

The core assumption behind ecological economics' growth critique is the concept of 'ecosystems'. In the discipline's founding text, "The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth", Kenneth Boulding conceptualises the planet as a global ecosystem that sustains human life:

[All human societies] receive inputs from the earth, the atmosphere, and the waters, and they give outputs into these reservoirs; they also produce inputs internally in the shape of babies and outputs in the shape of corpses
(Boulding, 1966, p. 2).

This was a revolutionary claim to make within 1960s' Western economic theory. Moreover, ecological economists now speak of "materials", rather than "resources". Yet, the abstraction and objectification of sentient and non-sentient organisms as in- and outputs – whether as resources or materials – neatly fits the modern drive for scalability and interchangeability that has been shaping growth-based economies for the past five hundred years. Both arguably have their origins in the 16th and 17th century Portuguese slave plantations of sugarcane in

what is now Brazil, whose scalable landscapes inspired industrialization and modernization in England and elsewhere (Federici, 2009, p. 54; Tsing, 2015, pp. 37–39). Interchangeability (of slaves, cane plants, machine parts, workers) commodifies products and humans; in other words, makes them exchangeable at market value (Tsing, *ibid*). In terms of scale, the sugarcane plantations served as the blueprint for modern factories, which “built plantation-style alienation into their plans” (Mintz, 1986 in Tsing, 2015, p. 38). The language of resources or materials accepts and mirrors the capitalist assignment of exchange value to nature’s intrinsic and incommensurable value.

Furthermore, rendering living organisms into abstracts (“materials”) is the ontological precondition for their incorporation into economic models and by extension, the market. It is anchored in the mechanistic worldview of nature as dead matter. This “managerial point of view” on nature sanctions resource exploitation (Merchant, 2020, p. 156), as this chapter has argued. The concept of ecosystems itself is based on the mathematical modelling of nature (*Ibid*). The previous subsection has shown that scientific developments of the last five hundred years produced ontological changes from a view of nature as alive, towards a mechanistic and materialist conception of an inanimate nature. Its prediction, control and manipulability, together with that of women and ‘primitive societies’, was achieved by combining science and technology with state bureaucracies to produce epistemic objects (the economy, society, agriculture, etc.) that could be summarised in statistical tables and compared cross nationally for colonial purposes (see also Chatterjee, 2012, pp. 420–30).

Ecological economics today uses those mathematical methods to abstract 'ecosystems' into economic in- and outputs models, for example through state or revealed preference models, cost benefit analyses, marginal abatement cost curves and so on. The use of economic modelling requires the translation of incommensurable values ("variables") into mathematical numbers, which are used to show the economic value of global ecosystems services and advocate for their protection (as can be seen in contemporary debates on biodiversity economics, e.g. Spash and Hache, 2021). Ecological economics therefore entrenches the nature/culture divide that underpins the coloniality of nature (see also Kolinjivadi, 2019). Aspects of degrowth scholarship that are rooted in this ecological critique of growth often draw on economic models to provide macro- or microeconomic evidence for postgrowth transitions.

Economic models underpin degrowth analyses and policy proposals on income, work, money, wellbeing and other areas (Akizu-Gardoki et al., 2020; Andreoni and Galmarini, 2014; D'Alisa and Cattaneo, 2013; Heikkinen, 2020, 2018; Jackson and Victor, 2020; O'Neill, 2012; Victor, 2012; Videira et al., 2014). While these models are useful, or even paramount for guiding policy, they conceptualise the living world as 'materials' and in doing so sustain a mechanistic worldview that sanctions resource exploitation. The ecological economics framework proposes that the economy is a sub-system of global ecosystems. In this conceptualisation, humankind is part of nature. However, this nature-as-ecosystems approach maps onto the world a single, provincial conceptualisation of nature. Moreover, by attributing agency to humans alone, ecological economics, and, by extension, many degrowth policy models articulate an anthropocentric worldview.

Environmental justice movements from the South have rejected degrowth allyship in part because of this anthropocentrism (Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2019). In this sense, the ecological growth analysis of degrowth unwittingly perpetuates the coloniality of nature. Nature as ecosystems, or mechanism, is closer to Baconian “dead matter” than the living world that we’re embedded in, related to, and dependent on.

This subsection has traced the history of two competing views: that of animate versus inanimate nature. I have shown how religious, scientific, and political developments in Europe have produced the dominance of the former over the latter, from the early Renaissance onwards. I have also critically analysed the construction of nature within degrowth, which continues to be characterised by the logic of domination, that is, coloniality. I argue that through provincialising the nature of degrowth, degrowth’s Eurocentric, mechanistic and anthropocentric aspects can be challenged. The third main section of this chapter therefore suggests viable cultural and political alternatives to the coloniality of nature, which contain within them cosmological limits to growth: attributing agency to the living world. Subsequently, Chapters Seven and Eight substantiate the cosmological limits to growth concept.

5.3. Cultural and Political alternatives to Coloniality of Nature

5.3.1. The Living World

Why is breaking with anthropocentrism important? Because to do so would break with those aspects of degrowth imagery that are built on the epistemic fiction of nature/culture that sustains capitalism and economic growth. It would also

Fig. 5.4 Anthropocentric vs eco-/cosmo-centric views of life

In the context of Classic Mayan society (Lucero and Gonzalez Cruz, 2020, reproduced with permission of the authors).

Apart from anthropocentric constructions of nature, environmental justice activists from the Global South also challenge Western notions of 'time' that are contained within degrowth policy proposals on work (Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2019). Following a (labour) market logic, these invariably clash with times of people and nature, or aboriginal and other indigenous temporalities such as the Andean '*Pacha*', which denotes the three different spatial and temporal spheres of the cosmos (Ibid). Eco-feminists have similarly challenged the nature/culture divide that disproportionately affects women across the globe (Salleh, 2009). This chapter therefore suggests that while remaining grounded in scientific principles, the degrowth movement should challenge anthropocentric, mechanistic conceptualisations of nature present in its discourse and policy proposals. In the following two subsections, I suggest two routes to attributing agency to the living world and overcoming anthropocentric nature/culture binaries within degrowth: the discipline of ecology and adopting Rights of Nature. These two subsections are preceded by this chapter's conclusion; namely, the case for a living world.

5.3.2. The scientific method vs. the scientific worldview

Some branches of ecology, especially ecosystem ecology, reproduce the mechanistic language of resources, materials, and flows. This chapter has identified these as belonging to a cosmology that enables and sanctions environmental exploitation. Yet, research into the ecology of trees can also be used to acknowledge symbiotic relationships between living beings and ultimately,

their agency. In anthropomorphising biological processes, the scientific method can also grant agency to non-human beings. Following Bacon, the dominant use of the scientific method has been linked to power over nature and people, from colonialism to enclosure. The scientific method in itself, however, is not coercive in and of itself. For Robin Wall Kimmerer, it's the scientific *worldview*, what has above been referred to as mechanism, rather than the scientific method, that reinforces our disconnect from nature. For her, the scientific, mechanist worldview serves "reductionist, materialist economic and political agendas" (2015, p. 346). As such, this thesis does not suggest abandoning scientific inquiry, nor should we jettison climate or economic models that have the potential to support socioecological transitions. Instead, I argue for using the scientific method to observe the human and non-human world from a non-anthropocentric, non-dualist perspective that is not geared towards dominance and control, but understanding and respect for divergent forms of life. In that sense, the ecology of trees makes a convincing argument for attributing agency, and therefore rights, to nature.

Research confirms that trees communicate and share nutrients through mycorrhizal networks. They do so with members of their own species, dying trees, and even members of different species (Simard et al., 1997). Another anthropomorphic feature is their habit of making what can be described as life-long friendships. These friendships only end with the death of both partners, within a short timespan (Wohlleben, 2017, chap. 1). Wohlleben contends that the years in which forest trees set seed, the "mast years", depend on the mutual agreements between sexual tree partners on when to engage in reproduction, and

feed and care for their offspring (2017, pp. 19–24, 32–36). Another anthropomorphic, cooperative feature of mutual aid amongst trees are warning signals to other species, sent out for instance by Douglas Firs, following drought or pest damage (Song et al., 2015; for eusociality in Staghorn Ferns see Burns et al., 2021; for mutual aid in animals, see Kropotkin, 1902). In times of severe drought, trees have been shown to emit ultrasonic pulses (WSL, 2018). Associated with the tree's suffering, these have been described as “cries of thirst” (Wohlleben, 2017, p. 48). However, inter-species relationships among trees aren't exclusively based on mutual aid. Trees can also release growth-boosting chemicals that harm rivals (Ferguson et al., 2003).

Given the fungal partnerships, mutual aid, communication and competition they engage in, trees have been described as “very social beings” (Wohlleben, 2017, p. 49). This conceptualisation of life as a web of relations between all living beings resembles, for example, the conceptualisation of an Andean *ayllu*, the territorial, political, social and economic structure that constitutes a community between extended families and non-human nature (Saavedra, 2010). While this subsection has focused on the anthropomorphic representation of the ecology of trees, the recognition of the rights of nature isn't limited to trees, or even the plant kingdom. Extracting “non-living” materials, such as copper, invariably produces the suffering of the “living” world. Scientific research on the fire-spreading hunting behaviour of raptors in Northern Australia (Bonta et al., 2017) confirms – or “validates” – knowledge previously dismissed as traditional and indigenous – in other words, inferior.

This section has shown that trees and fungi are capable of creating their own environments, engaging in social relations, as well as suffering. Therefore, together with the animal kingdom, they merit rights and protection from harm. The following chapter introduces two proposals for a new legal, non-proprietary category of protected areas as living forests (*Kawsak Sacha*) and sacred waters (*Cuencas Sagradas*) by different indigenous nations in Ecuador and Peru. These non-mechanistic ontologies and epistemologies could pose a conceptual challenge to the nature/culture dichotomy which, as I have argued, exacerbates the climate and ecological crises. In addition, the dialogue with racialised and Otherised ways of being and knowing may help recognise the (indigenous) 'Other' as equal agents in climate change adaptation and mitigation, rather than being seen as 'traditional societies', and objects of it.

5.3.3. Rights of Nature

In addition to cultural alternatives to the anthropocentric, mechanistic conception of nature that can be found in degrowth's ecological growth analysis, this subsection highlights a political alternative. Environmental personhood is becoming an increasingly popular policy option for overcoming environmental exploitation in practice and the nature/culture divide in modern social sciences. Rights of Nature (RoN) have been receiving growing public attention and theoretical scrutiny since the 1960s-1970s. Growing concerns about negative environmental effects of industrial consumer society have subsequently extended into legal theory and activism. Efforts to grant nature rights originate in US legal environmental philosophy in the 1970s, but since then have become a global, international movement (Stone, 1974; Nash, 1989; Cullinan, 2003; Burdon, 2011;

GARN, 2019a; Mari, 2014), or “transnational policy network” (Rawson and Mansfield, 2018). In Latin America, these efforts culminated in the inclusion of RoN in the Ecuadorian constitution (2008) and the Bolivian Law of the Rights of Mother Earth (2010). Both combine a liberal legal discourse with indigenous cosmologies. In a nod to those, Art. 71 of the Ecuadorian Constitution (2008) uses nature interchangeably with “Pachamama”, or Mother Earth, where life is reproduced and sustained. As such, it – or rather she – merits rights and protections.

When Ecuador became the first country in the world to adopt RoN as legal framework in its 2008 constitution, constituent assembly advisers who pushed for its inclusion drew on decades of writing on and theorising of nature as a subject, as well as some practical executions of the idea. The Montecristi constitution was preceded by the 2006 ban on toxic waste dumping by Tamaqua Borough in Pennsylvania, USA (Mari, 2014, p. 153), and followed by a plethora of recognitions of rivers, national parks and other ecosystems as legal persons with rights, from Colombia to New Zealand, India, the USA and Ecuador (CELDF, 2019). Some constitutional advisers are now working for the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN) in Quito and elsewhere. GARN has hundreds of members, mostly environmental organisations, from across all continents (GARN, 2019a, 2019b). Its first International RoN Tribunal was held in Quito in 2014, presided over by Vandana Shiva. The first court decision in favour of RoN in Ecuador was issued in 2017, upholding the Vilcabamba river’s “constitutional right to flow” (Sheehan, 2014, p. 168) vis-à-vis the dumping of toxic excavation material into the river by

the provincial government (Derechos de la Naturaleza, 2018). It was followed by several other court rulings in favour of RoN.

For the ancestral coastal community of “El Verdún” in Chone, Manabí, the court decision in favour of communal land ownership expanded conventional notions of private and public ownership. It also aimed to protect mangrove forests from industrial shrimp production (Jácome, 2020). Lack of monitoring and enforcement, however, pose a barrier to the usefulness of RoN in curtailing environmental harm in this instance and many others. Court rulings *against* RoN, such as that for Cónдор Mirador, an open pit copper megamine in the Southern Amazonian province of Zamora-Chinchipe, explicitly favoured development(-as-growth) over RoN (Kauffman and Sheehan, 2019, p. 357). Kauffman and Martin (2017) provide an overview of 13 RoN lawsuits in Ecuador, analysing the strategies, actors and legal tools behind the ten successful and three unsuccessful challenges. Ecocides from mineral extraction – favoured by some as the new basis for a post-petrol economy – and crude oil extraction are considered to be the main drivers of RoN violations in Ecuador today (Greene, 2020). While the movement for RoN has become a global phenomenon, the case of Ecuador is locally contingent and fraught with contradictions.

By drawing on indigenous cosmologies and development critiques that challenge the nature/culture binary, RoN can be a radical legal instrument applicable in a variety of local and national contexts (Rawson and Mansfield, 2018). Some argue, however, that by converging on the notion of ‘rights’, actors within the transnational RoN policy network universalise Western history and thought,

especially the nature/cultural binary they intend to overcome (Ibid). For them, the idea of nature as separate entity “out there” and in need of protection from us naturalises its separation from humankind, rather than questioning it. As such, integrating Pachamama into legal discourses in Ecuador or Bolivia could “result in an unintended validation and bolstering of the dominant paradigm [liberal law]” and turn the ancestral paradigm into a legal good (Tapia, 2016). The rights discourse is furthermore enmeshed with colonial constructs of who is and isn’t a legitimate, in other words, legal, person. As this chapter has shown, the creation of legal personhood and political subjectivities (e.g. the citizen), have evolved, and continue to do so, through colonial processes. Rawson and Mansfield (2018) deliver a detailed analysis of the impact of these processes in the creation of RoN as epistemic community and transnational policy network. These criticisms point to some of the philosophical challenges and practical difficulties that continue to be debated within the RoN discourse. Nevertheless, they do not detract from my argument: that RoN are a viable, if imperfect tool to protect the living world from harm. As all rights, their realisation depends on enforcement, monitoring, and implementation – issues that in regard to RoN are beyond this chapter to discuss.

In Chapter Seven, I examine RoN in the Ecuadorian context more closely, especially in relation to the political ontology of Buen Vivir. I also consider *Kawsak Sacha* and *Cuencas Sagradas*, two cosmologically contingent RoN proposals that present alternatives to development in the Ecuadorian Amazon. In both cases, the indigenous communities articulating these proposals strategically draw on the RoN discourse (Rawson and Mansfield, 2018). As demonstrated by my interviewees, however, these communities are acutely aware of how legal discourse contrasts

with their own cosmologies (Cisneros, 2020). Unlike some of the transnational policy network's actors, they don't consider RoN a "natural *and* political truth" and the only way to protect nature from harm (Rawson and Mansfield, 2018, emphasis in original), but use it to develop these particular alternatives to development.

5.4. The Case for A Living World

This chapter has provincialised, in other words, exposed as culturally specific, degrowth's conceptualisation of nature inherited from Ecological Economics. It has identified a mechanistic, materialist ontology and epistemic modernism, that is, control over nature through bureaucratic-scientific management, as the cultural foundations of the economic growth paradigm. From the start of the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, the image of nature as mechanism and disorder has sanctioned the exploitation of the living world and considered it no more than constituting inputs into the global market economy. This image replaced an earlier, organicist framework that articulated *cosmological* limits to environmental exploitation. The transition to a mechanist ontology in Renaissance Europe was accompanied by internal and external colonisation, and new forms of economic, social and political control over nature, women, and non-European societies. The term 'coloniality of nature' captures the universal imposition of this mechanistic view of nature as resource, eradicating pluralistic, non-mechanistic conceptualisations of nature. The quantification of people, nature and territories that arose from attempting to solve European colonial rivalry during the 19th century culminated in the institutionalisation of economic growth as economic policy, culture and political purpose during the 20th century. By historicising these

processes, in a necessarily brief manner, this chapter helped contextualise efforts to de-centre anthropocentric and mechanistic views of nature within degrowth.

Degrowth presents a critical, well-founded challenge to the doctrine of unlimited economic growth and corresponding social problems. Its ecological analysis of growth, however, often fails to scrutinise underlying ontological assumptions, specifically, the mechanistic, mathematical view of nature as 'ecosystem'.

Degrowth scholarship must be careful not to marginalise the colonial processes and concurrent material struggles that have accompanied the universalisation of nature as 'ecosystems', or resource, across the world. This chapter has presented arguments for discontinuing the 'coloniality of nature' in degrowth. Drawing on the modernity/coloniality discourse and eco-feminist, historical, and international relations scholarship, this chapter suggests that degrowth transcend the anthropocentric, mechanistic views of nature contained in its ecological growth critique in two ways. Culturally, attributing agency to the living world through moving from the language of "materials" to "the living world" would challenge degrowth's anthropocentrism. Politically, legal theory and activism have translated the possible agency of the living world into the discourse and practice of Rights of Nature (RoN). Rights of Nature are an innovative legal instrument that have the potential to bridge the modern/colonial world's "ontological rift" between a passive, objectified nature, and rational, knowledgeable society.

Moreover, in this chapter I conceptualised the 'coloniality of gender' as framework of analysis that incorporates the intersections of gender and sexuality with race and class to analyse how the creation of dichotomous, hierarchical gender regimes

for the colonised societies in the Americas hinged and continues to hinge on the exercise of power, that is, coloniality. The theoretical conceptualisation of decolonial and communitarian feminisms helps orient the gender politics of Buen Vivir that I explore in Chapter 7. Finally, in this chapter I also developed the conceptual groundwork for the final chapter's decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth, especially with regards to the coloniality of gender and nature. Embedding degrowth within decolonial struggles against the CMoP challenges its Eurocentric focus, while anchoring it in its relevant geographical and socio-economic spaces. In the following two chapters, which include the empirical study of Buen Vivir, I substantiate the argument that our way of thinking about the living world influences – and more importantly restrains – the ways in which we relate to it.

Chapter 6: Situating Buen Vivir/sumak kawsay as a grassroots, decolonial project

This thesis attempts to, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's words, provincialise degrowth. In using a language of supposed universals – resources and materials, growth and de-growth – intended to “win” the academic argument, the *scientifique* branch of degrowth also reveals the particular traditions and ideas it is built on (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. xiii). In the previous chapter, I have argued that despite its radical critique of the economic growth doctrine, degrowth's ecological analysis of growth reproduces anthropocentric understandings of nature. The ontology of degrowth ultimately facilitates nature's incorporation into economic models and the market. Epistemologically, this means privileging economic models and economic valuation methods that reproduce a narrow, economistic understanding of why non-human nature should be protected.

I have argued that an inter-epistemic dialogue with relational epistemologies and ontologies, and indeed other practices of socioecological transformation may facilitate overcoming degrowth's Eurocentric (and economistic) focus. In an effort to broaden degrowth's ontological and epistemological horizon, this chapter engages with a socioecological transformation discourse and practice from Latin America – Buen Vivir (BV; Good Living), or *sumak kawsay* in Ecuador. BV has become a well-established development critique with popularity far exceeding its geographical origin. This chapter is the first of two chapters that are dedicated to BV. The results of my interviews and participant observations are presented throughout these two chapters. Nevertheless, Chapter Six is the more theoretical

of the two, concerned as it is with definitions, political trajectory, and a literature review of BV. Chapter Seven, in turn, represents the empirical findings of my study in relation to the political economy, political ontology, and gender relations of BV.

In this chapter, a bilingual literature review situates BV as a grassroots, decolonial project. In it, I introduce the political context and theoretical framework of my fieldwork and analyse the discourse and knowledge production around BV. The first main section, operationalising and contextualising BV, consists of three subsections. First, I define Buen Vivir/sumak kawsay. Second, I make the case for an inter-epistemic dialogue between degrowth and BV. Third, I situate my fieldwork within the wider, post pink tide political contexts of Buen Vivir in Ecuador and Bolivia, in relation to my fieldwork. The second main section analyses the discourse and knowledge production of BV. First, I analyse the constitutionalisation of BV. Second, I situate my own approach to BV by examining the bifurcation, tripartite, and co-optation of BV. Third, I identify three impasses in the BV literature: a lack of available empirical data, romanticisation, and confirmation bias. Fourth, I chart the political trajectory of BV from the early 20th to the 21st century, thereby advancing debates around the genealogy of BV. Finally, the chapter concludes by situating BV as a political project, rather than a concept. The following pages start with briefly outlining the features of my fieldwork and defining Buen Vivir.

6.1. Fieldwork Background and Contextualisation

6.1.1. Operationalising Buen Vivir/sumak kawsay

The findings presented are based on 15 in-depth interviews I carried out with indigenous politicians and academics, mestizo urban professionals, rural indigenous women and others between January and March 2020. Though the outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic cut short my stay, I nevertheless produce novel insights and recommend areas for further research. The in-depth interviews were complemented by participant observations of public meetings, municipal and nongovernmental assemblies, field visits, public seminars and conversations with fellow academics and students at the Universidad Simón Bolívar Andina (Andean University Simón Bolívar) in Quito and at the Universidad de Cuenca (University of Cuenca) in Cuenca, southern Ecuador. The interview questions were informed by a bilingual literature review, as well as subsequent observations in the field.

Buen Vivir, or *sumak kawsay* (BV/sk) in Ecuador is widely regarded as an Andean-Amazonian conceptualisation of 'Good Living', that is, harmonious living with oneself, society and nature. It has received worldwide attention that spans disciplines, continents, and languages. BV/sk has been included as the right to Good Living in the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution, also called the Montecristi constitution. Loosely based on Andean-Amazonian cosmologies, Good Living delivers a critique of modern political categories and subjectivities, including the nature/culture and other binaries (developed/undeveloped, materially poor/rich). Buen Vivir is inspired by related concepts such as *sumak kawsay* (Kichwa), *sumaq*

qamaña (Aymara) and *ñande reko* or *tekó porã* (Guarani), *pénker pujústin* (Shuar), *shiir waras* (Ashuar), *ura urachunu* (Chapalachi), *waaponi monito ome kiwiñi tobamo kiwiñi* (Waoterero) and others (Acosta, 2017; CONAIE, 2012, p. 16). For one of my interviewees, Blanca Chancosa, former Kichwa leader of ECUANARI, the Confederation of Peoples of Kichwa Nationality in the Ecuadorian highlands, *sumak kawsay* is the translation of a dream, that is to say, reality, of the pre-colonial past into a political proposal. Rather than “rescue” a precolonial past, or justify its social structures, *sumak kawsay* attempts to recuperate ancestral memory with which to construct a more just and equal society. The harmony expressed in it isn’t limited to physical and social relations but refers to harmony between the material and spiritual realms (Velasque, 2020). To live well is to live in harmony with oneself, others, and the natural environment. Yet, for the (Ecuadorian) indigenous movement, this harmony translates into concrete political and economic proposals, subject of this and the following chapter. Before analysing the discourse and knowledge production of BV, the following two subsections respectively recap the benefits of establishing synergies between degrowth and BV, and analyse the political contexts of BV.

6.1.2. Synergies Between Degrowth and Buen Vivir

Following Escobar (2016), BV is conceptualised as *one of many systemic alternatives* to the modern/colonial world. Its near global popularisation merits more profound academic and practical engagement than has occurred to date. Bound up with personal history and professional interest, I hypothesised that the interpretation of BV as a critique of the multiple contemporary crises as *civilisationalary*, rather than socioecological, may serve to overcome degrowth’s

Eurocentric aspects. It's an epistemological question, not a relativist statement: BV isn't a monolithic social phenomenon. It would be more appropriate to speak of *Buenos Vivires* (Good Livings); a confluence of practices, imageries and ideals of historically marginalised communities towards harmony with the self, community and nature (Astudillo, 2020, p. 247). Nor does the interpretation of BV as response to the multiple contemporary crises consider BV as the *only* (valid) response to the civilisational crisis.

The interpretation of BV as a *civilisational alternative* complements degrowth's socioeconomic and ecological arguments. This approach hints at a provisional answer to the question of whether, and if so how, Buen Vivir can contribute to an ethical and normative, decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth.

Chapters Four and Five have pointed to those areas of degrowth which may benefit from inter-epistemic dialogues – Eurocentrism, feminism, and democracy.

With regards to the former, inter-epistemic dialogues may highlight ontological assumptions and epistemologies that are grounded in modern/colonial hierarchies. One of them is the anthropocentric, mechanistic and materialist understanding of nature, laid out by degrowth's ecological growth critique, presented in the preceding chapter.

By contrast, the epistemic field of BV is based on non-binary nature/culture relations, which stipulates the extension of agency and rights to nature, enshrined in Ecuador's 2008 constitution (Acosta and Brand, 2018a, p. 136). For Rojas et al. (2015), the diverse actors – in their case Black women from the North Cauca Valley in Colombia – struggling for their own version of Good Living activate political

ontologies and transitions towards the pluriverse. Relationality is a key epistemological concept that emerges from practices of solidarity and reciprocity in the praxis of BV/sk. Consequently, Buen Vivir isn't just territorially specific, but its practitioners produce theoretical and political tools that have been used by social movements and academic dissidents alike (Ibid). Here we can trace certain affinities with degrowth.

Being an activist-led science (see '3.1. The Beginning of an Activist Science'), degrowth aspires towards a co-constitutive relation between theory and practice. However, so far this has been an ambiguous relation at best, an aspiration more than articulation. Some recent efforts have been made to bridge this gap.

Degrowth Vienna 2020: Strategies for Socio-ecological transformation was the first degrowth conference whose organisers did *not* separate activist and academic sessions (Asara, 2020). Yet, in terms of peer-reviewed knowledge production, perhaps *the* agenda-defining question of contemporary degrowth research remains *how* "collectives and movements undo growth in practice, and unsettle its imaginary" (Kallis, 2018, p. 188). There is no doubt that degrowth is a social movement that participates in different strands of political life. Yet, degrowth epistemology and ontology is shaped by academic standards of knowledge production. As the previous chapter has shown, their entanglement with violent processes of (neo-)colonial appropriation and commodification of nature and peoples has consolidated the cultural basis of the economic growth paradigm in the global political economy: the ontological separation of nature from culture. The supposed co-constitutive relationship between theory and practice is

therefore another aspect in which interesting insights can be drawn for both degrowth and BV.

BV in its most radical sense is a *civilisational* proposal (Escobar, 2016), transcending environmental and socioeconomic issues. The intersection between the economy and ontology of BV, as well as the discussions' sustained analyses of territorial, social, cultural and political power relations nurtured my persistent interest in BV. Given historical and contemporary postcolonial contexts of exploitation and oppression, BV debates are shaped by a much stronger and structural engagement with power and governance than degrowth (Acosta and Brand, 2018a, p. 136). In contrast to degrowth, BV is an explicit project of *decolonisation* that from the outset is structured around social *and* ecological justice.

Yet, degrowth's effective, systematic analyses of economic growth and neoclassical economics can help situate the political economy of BV in a global context. The majority of BV economic analyses are founded on feminist economics and eco-feminism (I. León, 2010; León, 2008; M. León, 2010; Ugalde, 2017, 2015).

While this comes at the cost of excluding indigenous feminisms and plurinational rights, feminist critiques have pointed to the need for degrowth to be structured on both ecological *and* feminist economics. However, degrowth's focus on wellbeing indicators, energy/material/consumption flows and economic valuation methods has led, in the eyes of degrowthers, to a *de facto* victory of the (economic) argument on a theoretical, if not practical level. This may hold lessons yet for BV and its political economy. Though the preceding chapter has critiqued

this economic focus in its nature conceptualisation, degrowth's strengths lie in its systematic, quantitative and qualitative deconstruction of the economic rationality that pervades all aspects of life. While this approach therefore mustn't be dismissed, it isn't enough to address the civilisational crisis of the Anthropocene. This is why the synergies and dialogues between both BV and degrowth proposed in this thesis are so important.

Tension between the representation of BV as a grassroots, decolonial practice, as well as a lack of empirical studies further piqued my interest. The fact that key thinkers in Latin America explicitly linked BV and degrowth as transition narratives or projects (Dávalos, 2014a, p. 142; Escobar, 2015) sustained my hypothesis that synergies between degrowth and BV/sk are possible and desirable, and clarified the need for a sustained and systematic analysis of those synergies based on empirical research. Both degrowth and BV are part of a pluriverse of systemic alternatives to the modern/colonial system, none of which hold the solution to the civilisational crisis alone.

This thesis contributes to both degrowth and BV scholarship. Consequently, in this chapter and the remainder of the thesis I will approach BV from the parameters of the degrowth literature and think degrowth from the theory and practice of BV.

The fundamental premise of this work follows Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2007) call for diversity in epistemologies, consisting of "a plurality of knowledges beyond scientific knowledge". That approach foreshadows this chapter's conclusion: the case for an ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2009, 2007), a juncture of diverse ways of knowing with a view to transcending their respective limits and confronting the

multiple crises of the Anthropocene at their intersections. Abandoning the idea that one type of knowledge – scientific, peer-reviewed – is able to tackle these crises is one of the conditions for the dialogue between these two paradigms to be equitable. Degrowth *scientifique* and BV articulate different epistemologies, yet both argue for abandoning the privileging of economic over other knowledges. They contest modern categories from their respective places of relevance – development, economic growth, economism and mechanics, the idea of nature as a governable resource. As such, they're part of an ecology of knowledges; epistemic tools for the Anthropocene.

6.1.3. Post Pink Tide Political Contexts of Buen Vivir

The initial decision to conduct fieldwork in Ecuador or Bolivia was shaped by political events in both countries. The two plurinational states have constitutional and legislative mandates for the subordination of the economy to human and ecological wellbeing. Given that my primary interest lay in finding out whether and how a relational way of thinking about the natural world would affect theory and practice of socioecological transformation, my initial preference lay with Bolivia. Much more literature has been produced on the relationship between Aymara cosmology and *Vivir Bien/suma qamaña*, thanks to a resurgence in Aymara intellectual thought in the politics and social theories of Bolivia (see for example de Munter et al., 2017; Mamani et al., 2012; Saavedra, 2014; Yampara, 2011, 1995). In Ecuador, discussions around Buen Vivir or *sumak kawsay* haven't necessarily centred on the role of Andean or Amazonian cosmologies in its popularisation. Instead, they tended to focus on the Rights of Nature, economic pluralism and the two pillars that uphold BV in the constitution: plurinationality

and interculturality. In 2019, there was another reason for choosing to go to Bolivia, rather than Ecuador.

On 1st October 2019, the government of Rafael Correa's former vice-president and successor in office, Lenin Moreno was poised to accept a \$4.2 billion IMF loan. The agreement stipulated a drastic, near complete phasing-out of fossil fuel subsidies until 2021, approved as Decree 883, as well as reductions in capital, goods and services spending and public sector wages, liberalisation of labour market regulations and part-privatisation of publicly owned enterprises (IMF Western Hemisphere Dept., 2019, pp. 23–37). The loan agreement contrasts with post-2017 government spending on subsidies and tax exemptions for oil, mining, palm oil and other large companies. Intended to stimulate economic growth, shrink government spending and attract more foreign investment, Lang (2019) argues that these fossil fuel subsidies and tax exemptions have equalled \$4.295 billion, equivalent to loans proposed by the IMF.

Between 3rd and 12th October 2019, an initial strike of urban transport workers against the cuts in petrol and diesel subsidies grew into a national strike supported by a broad coalition of working and middleclass mestizo, women's, student and indigenous movements. Up to 40,000 people demonstrated in Quito alone, leading to increased solidarity between the popular sectors, but also brutal police oppression and human rights abuses (Lang, 2019). After declaring a state of emergency, the government fled from Quito to Ecuador's second largest city, Guayaquil. During the protests, eight people lost their lives, 1,340 were injured and 1,192 detained (DPE, 2019). The conflict was resolved following a dialogue

between the government and leaders of the uprising, mediated by the United Nations and the Catholic Church. While Moreno cancelled Decree 883, allowing a tacit peace to return to the streets in November 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic prompted renewed privatisations and public sector spending cuts of \$4 billion in May 2020, fuelling mobilisations and protests that continued throughout the year (Wadhwa, 2020). Moreno's neoliberalism thus drastically departed from Correa's state sponsored infrastructure, welfare and education programmes.

In an indictment of political stability across the Andean countries, subsequent events in Bolivia eclipsed the October uprising in Ecuador. Following an unconstitutional attempt to become president for a third time in October 2019, Evo Morales was forced to flee abroad by a *coup d'état*. Led by the country's police and military forces in collaboration with ultra-right wing paramilitary and opposition forces, the post-coup backlash against the perceived pro-indigenous politics of Bolivia's first indigenous president was marked by racist violence and symbolic racism (Kurmanaev and Krauss, 2019; Miranda, 2019; for an analysis of Morales' neoliberal politics, see Webber, 2011). Right-wing senator Jeanine Áñez unconstitutionally declared herself president, decreeing legal immunity for members of the armed forces who killed 23 civilian protesters in Senkata and Sacaba (Alvelais et al., 2020, chap. 5; Peterson, 2020). Morales later returned to Bolivia from exile following his MAS party's victory in the October 2020 elections. While some civil and political unrest continue, the underlying factors for the coup continue to be debated.²⁴

²⁴ Morales and others point to the role of the OAS and the US government (AFP-JJI, 2019; *The US-Supported Coup in Bolivia*, 2020). Others (Sánchez, 2019) mention Bolivia's lithium reserves and MAS plans to use state-owned companies to produce high-value cathodic materials and lithium ion

The Bolivian post-coup “climate of fear and misinformation” (Alvelais et al., 2020, p. 3) would not have been conducive to carrying out fieldwork. My research would have been defined by the aftermath of the coup and the changing political landscape –interesting, as a different project perhaps, but not congruent with my research goals. In Ecuador at the time, November 2019, dialogue between the popular sectors, social movements and the government heralded an agreement to cancel Decree 883.

The so-called “Left Turn”, or pink tide of progressive, socialist governments that ended the 1990s’ neoliberal era in Latin America seemed to have come full circle, and finally, to an end (with the possible exception of Argentina). Conventionally, and certainly in Anglophone research output, BV is closely associated with these Left Turn governments and the constituent assemblies in Ecuador and Bolivia under the Correa and Morales governments respectively. This impression has been honed by the governments themselves. Yet both Correa and Morales have been accused of appropriating and exploiting the term to justify pursuit of neo-extractivist policies. These financed economic and social redistribution with oil, gas and mineral revenues. Some empirical evidence, mine included, furthermore challenges the genesis of BV from within pink tide governments. Instead, indigenous women’s movements, municipal *Pachakutik* politics, the cooperative sector and others claim to have been involved in the construction of BV long before the Correa government and the 2008 constitution (Castillo, 2017; Lang, 2018; Lopez, 2020; Radcliffe, 2015a, p. 268). Regardless, BV-friendly

batteries for export to Europe, rather than allowing multinationals to extract and export raw materials to China or the US (AP News, 2019; DW, 2019; ETAuto.com, 2020).

municipal governments had left administrations, and with them ease of access to local or national civil servants or politicians.

Given that post-pink tide governments continued to pit development against the rights of nature and Buen Vivir, it was an interesting moment to travel to Ecuador to find out how BV is constructed in practice, and by whom. As it is, the communities who continue to aspire to their version of BV escape the false dichotomy presented by Ecuador's ostensibly post-neoliberal governments: that public goods and life can only be managed either by the state (Correa) or private companies (Moreno). Following February 2021 elections, Correa's handpicked candidate Andrés Arauz lost to conservative banker Guillermo Lasso. The ecological left comprised of indigenous, and mestizo environmental movements are poised to oppose extractive activities, likely to intensify under Lasso.

6.2. Discourse and knowledge production of *sumak kawsay*

6.2.1. Buen Vivir in the Ecuadorian 2008 Constitution

This chapter listed some of the indigenous concepts that are said to have inspired BV. The Ecuadorian constitution's translation of those into *Buen Vivir* (Good Living) is generally considered incongruent with the Kichwa etymology of *sumak kawsay* (*vida en excellencia*, life in excellence or plenitude Maldonado, 2014, p. 199).

During the constituent assembly, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) demanded the inclusion of their political proposals (BV in harmony with Pachamama, economy based on ancestral principles of reciprocity such as *ranti ranti*, *mingas* etc.). CONAIE technical assessors and assembly members like Pablo Dávalos succeeded in including Buen Vivir as an alternative to

development in the new constitution. Monica Chuji of the Sarayaku nation and other assembly members, however, suggested keeping the Kichwa term 'sumak kawsay', rather than Buen Vivir. They foreshadowed Davalos' analysis that Buen Vivir would become a government discourse to hide unequal power relations and continue neoliberal and extractivist policies (Cubillo-Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015). The following paragraphs briefly analyse the constitutionalisation of BV, since arguably, it was the constitution that heralded the global popularisation of BV as an alternative to development.

The Montecristi constitution presents the right to Good Living as a sub-set of rights to water and alimentation, a healthy environment, communication and information, culture and science, education, habitat and housing, health, and work and social security (Ecuador Const., 2008, pt. II, arts. 12–34). The Kichwa word 'sumak kawsay' only appears three times in the entire text, used synonymously with Buen Vivir. In contrast to indigenous interpretations of sumak kawsay as a form of social and economic organisation, the constitution frames BV as utopian goal. Rather than means to an end, BV is turned into an end itself (Churuchumbi, 2014, pp. 22, 24, 26). While this isn't the place for an in-depth legal analysis of the 2008 Montecristi Constitution of Ecuador, the following contradictions in relation to Buen Vivir are important to note:

- Buen Vivir is presented as *one set of rights among many*; however, these aren't explicitly linked to the *collective rights* of groups and communities (e.g. indigenous nationalities, Afro-Ecuadorians, etc.)

- The constitution doesn't provide mechanisms to delineate rights and responsibilities where these overlap: communities are guaranteed rights to access resources to live a good life, but simultaneously are required to comply with the rights of nature (Churuchumbi, 2014, pp. 21, 23; Ecuador Const., 2008, pt. VII)
- Rights are given to nature and communities to safeguard their ancestral lands (Ecuador Const., 2008, Art. 67, par. 4, 5, 8, 10), yet the state retains sole possession over all renewable and non-renewable resources, including subsoil products such as hydrocarbon and mineral deposits (Aguirre, 2020; Ecuador Const., 2008, Art. 408)
- the constitution includes two potentially conflicting governance regimes – that of BV and that of “development” (Ecuador Const., 2008, pt. VI) without clarifying relationship between the two.

The contradictions of this internationally celebrated constitution tacitly hint at the difficulty of arriving at a shared understanding of BV. In itself, that is, decoupled from the lived experience, culture, linguistics, and daily practices of (Kichwa) communities, “it can mean a lot and almost nothing” (Chancosa, 2020). The questions of what it means for whom and how it is used by different groups have been debated extensively, in Ecuador and beyond.

6.2.2. Three approaches to Buen Vivir: bifurcation, tripartite and co-optation

The most common approach to BV is to distinguish between its different understandings and uses, as well as between Buen Vivir and *sumak kawsay*. BV thereby tends to be used by the “progressive” Pink Tide governments, whereas

sumak kawsay/sumaq qamaña tends to be used by certain civil actors and movements, especially indigenous ones (Gudynas, 2014b, p. 26). This chapter does not follow this distinction analytically. A historical analysis of their origin and trajectory contextualises the distinction between Buen Vivir and sumak kawsay. The processes behind this “bifurcation” (the government appropriation of BV through development plans and populist use of the term) are said to destroy BV as a plural concept and alternative to modernity and development (Gudynas, 2014b, p. 29). However, while the government appropriation of BV, emptying it of its “indigenous content”, is commonly accepted both in the literature and by my interviewees (Acosta, 2015), it does not preclude different actors using the terms interchangeably. Using solely Buen Vivir, however, renders invisible the indigenous epistemological provenance of the concept. Rather than equate or conflate the two terms, this chapter attempts to contextualise their use and meaning. As such, from here onwards the abbreviation BV/sk is used to refer to the term in its meaning as civilisationary alternative, since it has acquired meaning beyond its Kichwa origins. ‘BV’ is used to refer to governmental interpretation.

The government appropriation of BV can be considered as an attempt to submit plurinationality – the ability of indigenous nationalities to exercise collective rights and self-determination within the political space of the modern state – to an “absolute harmony” through symbolically and discursively masking the state as “good friend” (Muniz, 2017). During his presidency (2007-2017), Rafael Correa pursued a neo-extractivist development strategy, redistributing wealth and building infrastructure projects for urban, rural and remote communities. Simultaneously, his government curtailed indigenous rights and prosecuted

environmental defenders as terrorists, condoned racism towards the country's indigenous population, and granted oil concessions in indigenous territories without prior free and informed consultation (Novo, 2018, 2013; Picq and Jaramillo, 2018). One of my interviewees illustrates the point:

the populism of *alli kawsay* [version of *sumak kawsay* in the Ecuadorian highlands] in Ecuador meant corruption, political persecution, imprisonment of social leaders, poverty vouchers [...] The Buen Vivir of capital, [...] mineral exploitation, aggression towards ecological reserves [...] The Buen Vivir of this country's rich who take all the money out of the bank and out of the country, to raise interests, including appropriating the strips of land for which we couldn't pay the interests to the bank, that is the *alli kawsay* of the Ecuadorian capitalism. (Velasque, 2020)

Furthermore, by using BV as a discursive tool for domination while excluding social movements from the political process, the Correa government sought to displace plurinationality from the political agenda (Bretón, 2013; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2017; Simbaña, 2020). For the indigenous movement, plurinationality is tied to the collective struggles of the 1990s for economic and political justice in a uni-governmental, but plurinational state that guarantees the rights of all Ecuadorian indigenous peoples (CONAIE, 2012, p. 55). Its objective of social self-determination resulted in concrete proposals for state administration and structures. These would implement *sumak kawsay* in real life, contrary to the Correa government's interests (Simbaña, 2020). For Floresmilo Simbaña (2020), who is part of the Ecuadorian indigenous political movement, "sumak kawsay is impossible outside of the community, and outside plurinationality". The rhetoric of BV thus came to obfuscate authoritarianism, violence and state repression of indigenous and ecological movements.

I have presented three uses of BV. First, by the government; second, by indigenous groups (as *sumak kawsay*); third, by academics and activists as an alternative to development. Table 6.1 sums up Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara's (2017) similar categorisation of BV.

Approach	Primary Concern	Intellectual sources
"indigenist" or pachamamist"	(indigenous) identity, recreation of "harmonious living conditions of the indigenous peoples of Abya Yala" & self-determination through plurinationality	Indigenous Amazonian intellectuals reject sustainable development paradigm put forward by World Bank & Inter-American Development Bank in 1990s; proposal of <i>sumak kawsay</i> as alternative to development subsequently disseminated to Andean intellectuals
Socialist / statist	Equity, resource, and wealth redistribution by state, which is sole political agent & interpreter of the population's will; exclusion of social movements; neo-extractivist economic model	Neo-Marxist dependency theory; human, sustainable, and endogenous development theories; happiness economics, Aristotelian eudaemony, intercultural feminism etc.
Ecological/ Postdevelopment (most international exposure and intellectual legitimacy,	Sustainability; overcoming of extractivist model through Rights of Nature; <i>Buen Vivir</i> as utopia but	Dependency, modernity/coloniality and liberation theories; ecology (deep ecology, biocentrism); post-extractivism; degrowth;

up to twinning BV & Degrowth)	alternative to development	eco-/subsistence feminism; social solidarity economy & indigenous community economics
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Table 6.1 Buen Vivir literature analysis by Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara (2017)

Their useful distinction is based on an extensive literature review, rather than empirical data. Consequently, it is debateable whether the three goals pertaining to each primary concern (equity, sustainability, identity) are quite as rigidly separated and mutually exclusive to the other strands – as the authors themselves acknowledge. Another problem is their uncritical use of the word ‘pachamamist’, which as they correctly point out is a pejorative term to describe a political or ideological position that defends indigenous rights and lived experiences. Contrary to what they claim, however, their use of the term doesn’t convey a positive meaning. While useful and in many respects accurate, I therefore consider Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara’s (2017) typology constrained by its separation of the intersections between the knowledge produced by post-development scholars and indigenous ways of knowing and being. Rather than making ideological distinctions, it might be more useful to distinguish between empirical (including textual and historical analyses) and non-empirical studies. Empirical studies, however, aren’t free from bias or essentialisations, as the paragraphs below show.

My own fieldwork was dedicated to producing results of BV in practice in relation to degrowth. This research therefore favours Table 6.1’s first and third strands. Yet, it also transcends them by approaching the practice of BV/sk as grounded in

plurinationality and interculturality, as well as postdevelopment and sustainability.

In that sense, Gudynas' threefold distinction between the uses of BV is helpful:

- generic use as general critique of development, particularly by Pink Tide governments without offering alternatives to growth-based development;
- restricted use as critique of capitalist development, but proposal within modernity ("BV socialism" or "Republican Biosocialism");
- substantive use as critique of development and proposal for alternatives to it; confluence of many traditions, most importantly indigenous knowledges and relational ontologies (2012, pp. 74–75).

This thesis will consequently deploy the term in its substantive use as a confluence of radical alternatives to development. For Gudynas, this use of the term belongs to the "original debate of Buen Vivir" and best reflects its historic origins. Other what Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara (2017) would classify as "indigenist" authors concur that BV/sk only has meaning in its most radical sense, that is, as cosmo-centric vision that is different and opposed to Western capitalist modernity (Nuñez del Prado, 2015, p. 65). However, a more thorough and critical literature review brings up a host of problems and biases within many of the texts about BV. The most important ones pertain to unsubstantiated claims, confirmation bias and essentialisation of indigenous peoples.

6.2.3. Lack of empirical data, romanticisation, and confirmation bias – about the impasses of the BV/sk literature

This subsection identifies three issues with the literature on BV/sk: lack of empirical data, romanticisation, and confirmation bias. First, and perhaps the most

academically frustrating issue found in most of the BV literature, is the lack of empirical evidence offered by authors who claim – rightly or wrongly – that *sumak kawsay* stems from the indigenous world and proposes “an-other” world based on non-Western epistemological and ontological principles. They do so without providing ethnographic, ethnohistorical, anthropological or historical data – a concern which has motivated the present research. This issue pertains to most of the literature in Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara’s (2017) “*indigenista*” category (Acosta, 2017, 2013; Carcelén-Estrada, 2016; Chuji, 2009; Dávalos, 2014b; Gudynas, 2014b, 2014c, 2013, 2012, 2011; Maldonado, 2014; Oviedo, 2014; Rengifo et al., 2019; Walsh, 2010, 2009). Many of these authors are indigenous and therefore speak from their own lived experience, while the non-indigenous authors at least engage with these experiences. However, there are some issues around the colonial legacy of appropriating indigenous knowledge.²⁵ For Martínez Novo (2018), this is the continuation of the 16th century colonial practice of assigning legal advocates to the indigenous population, who in official matters were represented by these *protectores de indios*. Indigenous people needed to be spoken *for* because they had no (legal) voice within the *encomienda*²⁶ system, which in Ecuador lasted until the 1964 Agrarian Reform. In this context, many Anglophone BV publications can be seen as a continuation of this particular form of racism – ventriloquism. My research grapples with this problem too, since it reads BV/sk as a civilisational alternative to modern/colonial ontologies and epistemologies. To avoid ventriloquism, the

²⁵ Alberto Acosta (2020) counters with the assertion that he is not an “expert” but a “student” of BV/sk. To him, indigenous thinkers like Ariruma Kowii would be experts because of their identity and lived experiences.

²⁶ Slavery-based labour and agricultural system introduced under Spanish colonial rule.

research design and methodology centred the lived experiences of indigenous peoples in Ecuador.

In that regard, I orient my research on Miriam Lang's (2018) seminal text on the bottom-up construction of *sumak kawsay* in the low-income county of Nabón, southern Ecuador, governed by two female *Pachakutik* mayors from 2000 until 2019. Lang translates the theoretical discussion on BV/sk into analysis without necessarily clarifying whether BV/sk was a stated municipal development objective (L Araujo, 2020, pers. comm., 1 September). Yet, the study draws on empirical data to detail the reported increases in objective and subjective wellbeing following public-communitarian partnerships, participatory budgeting, increasing female autonomy through social, political, educational and economic opportunities, the recovery of food sovereignty through soil restoration and local ecosystem protection. In painting the historical and political context of Nabón, the study stresses that civilisational alternatives *coexist* with hegemonic discourses – a characteristic that is certainly true for the present research's case studies.

Furthermore, in contrast to most of the BV/sk literature, Lang stresses that

What matters here is not the *purity* of the discourse or indigenous practice, but the orientation it may give, the directionality towards which a social process is directed regarding either the deepening of the civilisational crisis or the maintenance of those interrelated, multiple equilibria that are necessary for the reproduction of life (2018, p. 53; my own translation, emphasis in original).

She thereby contributes to the construction of *sumak kawsay*, as much as the *Pachakutik* politicians. The present analysis of BV/sk follows this interpretation of BV/sk as civilisational alternative that is always in construction, non-linear, contested and imperfect, but simultaneously world-building and encouraging.

The second issue with much of the literature, in addition to lack of empirical evidence, including empirical studies, is their (varying degrees of) romanticisation and essentialisation. Pertinence to this second category doesn't exclude it from falling into the first one – lack of empirical evidence. The non-empirical studies which romanticise indigenous life tend to view BV/sk as a discursive and pedagogical tool for learning from the *ayllus* and the reciprocal economic and social systems of indigenous people (Cortez, 2011, 2010; Ugalde, 2015). Similarly, Cubillo-Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán (2015) pursue the origins of *sumak kawsay* as a “genuine” social phenomenon in the life-world of the Sarayaku *pueblo*²⁷ at the expense of other nationalities and especially highland Kichwas. This contradicts Lechón's (2017) historical analysis of *sumak kawsay*'s use by highland Kichwas in the 20th century (see Table 6.2). Due to acculturation and assimilation, which were especially strong in the highlands, it is not surprising that many highland Kichwas wouldn't have heard of the concept (cf. Morocho, 2017). Additionally, the quest for the origin of *sumak kawsay*, who was first to use it, or even who “founded” it as it were, follows a modern rationality preoccupied with charting a teleological progress of history (L Araujo, 2020, pers. comm., 12 July). To date, this has consigned indigenous rationalities to the “waiting room” of knowledge production, “not yet” (if ever) ready to produce scientific knowledge (cf. Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 65). My research, though providing political context, wasn't concerned with uncovering a true, or primordial practice of BV/sk, but lived experiences embedded in local contexts and histories.

²⁷ A *pueblo* translates to people or peoples. Considered a group of the same historical origin, shared cultural and linguistic elements have produced specific organisational structures in a given territory (CONAIE, 2012, p. 54). Different *pueblos* can coexist in a nation state such as Ecuador but can do so equitably only if able to exercise autonomy and collective rights (cf. plurinationality).

In addition to the tendencies of ventriloquism and essentialisation, a third characteristic of the BV/sk literature is confirmation bias. Guillermo Churuchumbi's (2014) study, for example, is one of the earliest empirical contributions to the daily use of *sumak kawsay* in Cayambe. He found no evidence for the use of *sumak kawsay* in the daily life of the Cayambe *pueblo*. Instead, they refer to *alli kawsay*, the everyday equivalent to the more spiritually related *sumak kawsay* (see Table 6.2). Churuchumbi (2014) concludes that for the Cayambis, Good Living lies in self-governance and collective existence, characterised by good relations with one's natural surroundings as well as one's family and community. The author's position at the time as president of the Cayambe *pueblo* may have weighted his analysis towards *alli kawsay* as self-governance. A second, rare, empirical study (Astudillo and Cordero, 2018) on the role of communal work in the practice of BV in a coastal Ecuadorian indigenous community elucidates interesting insights, namely that the practice of BV is found in that community's collective labour, ecotourism, and social solidarity economy. However, their conclusion may be a deductive fallacy since we do not know the full premise of their research framework. After observing collective labour, ecotourism etc., these practices are interpreted as BV without clarifying whether informants themselves consider them as such. A similar confirmation bias seems to pervade another empirical BV study in Zhiña, South Ecuador (Ferrer et al., 2019). Given the nature of my research – interviews, rather than in-depth case studies – the present research may exhibit similar traits. However, my research at least inductively explores the question whether my participants consider their practices as BV/sk directly. My interviewees were asked what BV/sk means for them. Thus prompted, they all

produced an answer to that question, whether in the North or the South of the country. Their answers provide insights to the conundrum of how communities in practice translate what can be an empty signifier (BV/sk), and what aspects they embrace respectively. The parameters that defined my research therefore also serve to avoid confirmation bias – in dislocating previous assumptions about the origin or otherwise of BV, it centres the lived experiences of rural and urban communities vis-à-vis political economy, nature/culture and gender relations.

Finally, on the other end of the spectrum are academic publications that argue from a cultural relativist point of view (Bretón, 2013; Morocho, 2017; Sánchez Parga, 2011). Bretón's (2013) analysis of BV as a discursive tool for domination is well-argued; however, his assessment of BV as an invented tradition seems to contradict indigenous testimonies. Another trope is to insist, like one of my mestizo interviewees, that "the concept called *sumak kawsay* doesn't mean anything in reality". Detached from plurinationality, interculturality and life in collective, the urban mestizo middle classes of Quito cannot relate to BV/sk. BV/sk, once more, is territorial and context dependent.

Much of this type of thinking, found in academic literature as well as in popular publications and from some of my mestizo interviewees, is based on an ill-founded certainty that BV/sk didn't exist before the indigenous struggles of the 1990s or the 2008 Montecristi constitution. Articulating this claim, especially in academic publications, without having attempted to research the for instance (ethno-)historical or anthropological evidence amounts, even unwittingly, to the type of epistemic racism that has been perpetuated by the (colonial) academy for

the past two hundred and fifty years. These analyses ignore the lived reality of what BV/sk means for the participants of my interviews, for example: having clean water, rivers and pure air, fertile soil, native trees etc. The recuperation of ancestral seeds such as amaranth or recognising the four elements at the beginning of an encounter contribute to the construction of *sumak kawsay* (as opposed to an academic discourse). It's a learned discourse, an invented tradition perhaps, but a political project at the same time.

Consequently, this chapter doesn't focus on reductive and cultural relativist readings of BV/sk, nor on its statist interpretation and appropriation. The aim of this thesis – producing synergies between two systemic solutions to climate change and the civilisational crisis it is embedded in – naturally pervades my reading of BV/sk. I therefore examine BV/sk both as a confluence of radical alternatives to development, as well as a practice of resistance and re-existence. In my own research, I focus on the contemporary use and political power of BV/sk.

For the literature that informed my analysis, I focus on empirical work and the writings by those who are engaged in the construction of BV/sk as utopia. These texts and proposals loosely fall under the category of “onto-political” alternatives to modernity/coloniality: alternatives to (growth-based) development, in which Nature, or more precisely, territory, is a political actor and subject. This focus allows me to distinguish between the ideological differences in the literature and recognise efforts to analytically colonise the meaning of BV by excluding its spiritual elements. The claims of indigenous authors and intellectuals who write about their experience therefore ought to be taken seriously: that *sumak kawsay*

is an ancestral concept turned political platform for equality, redistribution of wealth, territory and self-governance (Chancosa, 2014; Cochi, 2017; Simbaña, 2011; Viteri Gualinga, 2002). Moreover, Lechón's (2017) analysis of historic texts in both Spanish and Kichwa trace the development of *sumak kawsay* – or *alli kawsay* in the highlands – from at least the early 20th century onwards. It lends strength to the argument that these two concepts (as opposed to their government appropriated form of Buen Vivir) have some grounding in the lived experiences and daily practice of the Kichwa peoples of the Ecuadorian highlands and Amazon.

Following Part I of this thesis, which explored the intellectual foundations, practice, and ontological critiques of degrowth, Chapter 6 has so far focussed on the knowledge production of BV/sk. Chapter 7 will explore the political economy, gender relations, and ontology of BV/sk and prepare the conclusions to this thesis. The current main section, '6.2. Discourse and knowledge production of *sumak kawsay*', concludes with an analysis of the political trajectory of BV/sk and definition of what BV/sk means for my interviewees.

6.2.4. Trajectory of *alli kawsay*, *sumak kawsay* and Buen Vivir

In this subsection, I briefly intervene in the modernist debate around the origins of the term and practice of *sumak kawsay*. My intervention is delineated by the scope of current research. Since Lechón (2017) only investigates texts dating to the early 20th century, further historical research would help clarify the ethnographic record or otherwise of *sumak kawsay*. If viewed from a phenomenological perspective, as done by Cubillo-Guevara & Hidalgo-Capitán (2015), *sumak kawsay* is “real” as soon as it's observed by someone (e.g.

anthropologists). In contrast, my extensive, bilingual literature review, and interview results demonstrate that:

A) *sumak*, or *alli kawsay* is a concept that originates in the indigenous world, with textual evidence dating back to the beginning of 20th century.

B) early 20th century texts connect *sumak kawsay* to education, a link that continues into the 21st century with the founding of the Intercultural “Pluriversity” of the Indigenous Nationalities Amawtay Wasi. It corroborates findings that *sumak kawsay* has primarily been used as a “pedagogical principle” by the indigenous movements (Simbaña, 2020).

C) The “filling” of the concept coincided with the strengthening of indigenous organisations. Texts from the 1980s demonstrate that the confluence of language, culture, thinking and economic activities can be said to configure a proper, own form of life of the Kichwa people, which Lechón (2017) calls the *alli kawsay de la sierra*, or the Good Living of the (Andean) highlands. This presupposes intimate relations with the land, within families and with the spirits of ancestors and those of water and hills. Knowledges and the wisdom of Good Living is achieved through strengthening Kichwa identity, culture and thinking (“*con unidad por la tierra y la vida hermosa hasta liberarnos*” – “united for land, life in plenitude and liberty”).

Kichwa identity and culture today are also situated within struggles against systemic exploitation, oppression and discrimination, but also the creation of

organising structures towards implementing interculturality²⁸ and plurinationality to achieve *alli kawsay* (Lechón, 2017).

D) The “emptying” of *sumak kawsay* as meaningful concept and plural platform coincides with the weakening of the indigenous movement as political actors from the late 2010s onwards. Various planning documents under the Correa governments present the state as “good friend” to indigenous communities (SENPLADES, 2009, 2007). Simultaneously, the state undermined these communities’ way of life through the eradication of bilingual education centres, the closure of Amawtay Wasi in 2014 and above all, the distribution of mining concessions to multinational corporations in indigenous territories (Muniz, 2017; Novo, 2013).

E) *sumak kawsay* emerged at the interface of development and indigenous organisations – in other words, through a confrontation of knowledges, systems, worldviews (Lechón, 2017; Novo, 2018), or as this chapter argues, an ecology of knowledges. The 1992 OPIP Amazanga Plan, for example, often – and erroneously – cited as the first mention of *sumak kawsay*, reads like a conventional development plan that would have been influenced by technical advisers. The two-page *Sacha Runa Yachay*²⁹ proposal that contains “*sumac causai*” is preceded by over 50 pages of geographical, topographical, ecological and economic survey data that examines a “nature out there”, apart from humans (the plan itself can be consulted in Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2019). Nevertheless,

²⁸ The CONAIE defines interculturality as the political and ideological principle of recognising the practice of people, communities, pueblos and nations in order to create just, and equitable relations between indigenous nations, Afroecuadorians, montubios and mestizos in a plurinational society (CONAIE, 2012, p. 55).

²⁹ Wisdom of the people of the rainforest (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2019, p. 83).

subsequent dissemination of *sumak kawsay* to Andean indigenous organisations and left-wing mestizo intellectual circles³⁰ resulted in its inclusion as a constitutional mandate. Table 6.2 sums up the political developments that culminated in the inclusion of BV/sk in the 2008 Montecristi constitution of Ecuador:

Timeframe	Key Developments	Source
1980s	Political and ideological formulation of <i>sumak kawsay</i> within educational movement of indigenous organisations: “ <i>shuclla shine allpamanta sumak kawsaymanta quishpirincacaman</i> ” / “ <i>con unidad por la tierra y la vida hermosa hasta liberarnos</i> ” (United for land, life in excellence and liberty) – situated within fight against system of exploitation, oppression, discrimination; cultural and political counterhegemonic struggle that culminated in creation of own system of organisation, interculturality and plurinationality central to <i>sumak kawsay</i>	(Lechón, 2017)
	notion of postdevelopment brought to peoples of Ecuadorian Amazon through “foreign and native anthropologists” (Descola, Viteri, Mader) and studies by ILDIS (Latin American Institute of Social Research, associated with German social democratic foundation Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung); discourse of <i>sumak kawsay</i> as “theorisation of resistance to development, and the search for alternatives [...] was based on the specific world	(Acosta, 2000; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2017)

³⁰ Especially to Alberto Acosta, president of the constituent assembly.

	view of peoples of the Amazon” (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2017)	
End of 1980s	Sumak kawsay moves from indigenous intellectual/ social movement circles to large international development agencies and mainstream academics: adoption of sumak kawsay by Interamerican Development Bank because of Carlos Viteri’s post there; <i>Fondo Indígena</i> also began discussing “Development with Identity for Buen Vivir”; Link between intellectuals discussing sumak kawsay or sumaq qamaña and development agencies through funding or the Catholic Church	(Cubillo-Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2017)
	convergence of political left with indigenous movement against capitalist forms of exploitation and oppression of indigenous peoples; indigenous movement searching for equilibrium between ethnic and class revindication	(Cortez, 2011)
1990s	Civilisational change proposed by indigenous movements in Ecuador in conjunction with development agencies and organisations as well as non-indigenous and indigenous academics	(CONAIE, 1997; Novo, 2018; Shabeer, 2016)
	quick assimilation of Amazonian concept of sumak kawsay by Andean intellectuals (in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia) because Amazonian indigenous participated in indigenous movement together with Andean communities; sumak kawsay easily translated/ understood in Kichwa despite different references points (no Pachamama in Amazonian cosmologies, plus 500-year long acculturation and loss of cultural	(Cubillo-Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2017)

	institutions, except for minga and ranti ranti, but still easy incorporation of concept)	
Early 2000s	Sumak kawsay transcends academic realm and enters public one, e.g. through Column of Carlos Viteri 2004	
	influence of D. Temple's reciprocity theory (2003, financed by GTZ) & coloniality discourse on how Andean intellectuals try to "recreate the conception of desirable life that supposedly existed in the past"	
	recognition of traditional left that unity lies in diversity, convergence with indigenous and afro-descendant's struggles	(Amawtay Wasi, 2004; Cortez, 2011)
	Sumak kawsay as central pedagogical element of Amawtay Wasi	
Mid-2000s	Adoption of sumak kawsay into new left government and citizen revolutions as "Republican Biosocialism" via constituent assembly and Correa's government plans	(Alianza País, 2006; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2017)
Mid-2000s to mid-2010s	Buen Vivir as 'human development' paradigm inscribed into two subsequent National Development Plans; BV as ultimate goal of human, sustainable and endogenous development following Sen's capabilities approach, community and solidarity economics and ecological movements	(SENPLADES, 2009, 2007)

Table 6.2 Key political trajectory of BV/sk in Ecuador

While the origins of *sumak kawsay* in its contemporary form can be found at the interface between development NGOs and indigenous organisations (Novo, 2018), the presented evidence suggests that this was a recovery, or recuperation of memory and praxis, rather than an invention of tradition. The statement that “the interpretation of *Sumak Kawsay* as an indigenous critique to development and modernity” can therefore be considered valid; however, it does *not* seem to be “a ventriloquist idea that does not originate in the communities” (Novo, 2018). The origin of BV/sk lies in the pedagogy of indigenous socialist movements that responded to poverty, illiteracy and the discrimination towards their communities, in other words, the coloniality of power. BV/sk can therefore be considered an indigenous critique to coloniality/modernity long before the advent of the modern development discourse. The 1990s saw the continuation of its initial purpose – to serve as a pedagogical principle, in this case to resist encroaching sustainable development projects into Ecuadorian Amazonian communities. However, that isn’t to say that there are no ventriloquist tendencies within the BV/sk discourse. When it does become ventriloquism is when indigenous peoples are *only* listened to “if they adopt those discourses that are prepared for them” (Novo, 2020). Churuchumbi (2014), for example, found certain community leaders in Cayambe to be adopting the term *sumak kawsay* into their language for perceived political benefit. However, at the community level, a *chasque* and wisewoman with whom I talked to contradicts:

in our communities, we do still have *sumak kawsay* because we are connected with nature; because we can still talk with each other in confidence [over the fire, as a ritual], sharing our

experiences; because we can share our pain and share our food. It's all there. Because we still have our celebrations, all of it.

While this isn't necessarily proof that *sumak kawsay* is found, as Acosta (2020) argues, in the lived experiences and practices of *all* indigenous peoples, it shows that at least for one of my interviewees, who is a leader in her community and part of the Saraguro *pueblo*, *sumak kawsay* is part of *her* lived experiences and practices. Similarly, the president of the agroecological women's association *Sumak Mikuna* contends that

talking about our *sumak kawsay* means to be well proudly. Why? Because our dresses, our tradition, our culture, as well as the environment – we need to take care of them!

Mirian Cisneros (2020), president of the Sarayaku nation from where the

contemporary debate on *sumak kawsay* originated, confirms that:

For us it has been very important to ground ourselves in *sumak kawsay*, in the *Buen Vivir* of our people, of our cultures, generations. Because there is the space where we cultivate our products. The economy, culture, traditions, our science, our technology. Our very own architecture. In other words, a cultural wealth we want to preserve.

The women quoted illustrate the fact that *community* is the central axis on which the theoretical *sumak kawsay* discourse is built in practice (Acosta, 2020; Simbaña, 2020). This finding is corroborated by Lang's interview participants: "Buen Vivir means life in community" (Quezada cited in Lang, 2018, p. 54). In Ecuador (and in contrast to Bolivia), focusing on the community as an analytical framework has also helped reduce speculation on the meaning and content of BV/sk (Simbaña, 2020). *Sumak kawsay* is located in the lived experiences of indigenous peoples across Ecuador when there are communal, reciprocal and convivial relations.

6.3. A political project

This chapter has defined BV/sk, argued for establishing links and synergies with degrowth, and examined the discourse and political trajectory of BV/sk in Ecuador. BV/sk, an Andean-Amazonian conceptualisation of ‘Good Living’, originates in the indigenous world of the highland Kichwas. An indigenous pedagogical principle, *sumak kawsay* translates into ‘life in excellence or plenitude’. From a postdevelopment perspective, it can be said to represent an ‘alternative to development’. The strengthening of the indigenous movements during the 1980s and 1990s culminated in the constitutionalisation of *sumak kawsay* as *Buen Vivir* and the right to Good Living in the 2008 Montecristi constitution of Ecuador. The emptying of the concept coincided with the weakening of the indigenous movements during the Rafael Correa governments (2007–2017) and political oppression of social, indigenous and environmental movements. The government appropriation of BV under Correa served to sanction extraction-led development, which is opposed to the indigenous vision for *sumak kawsay*. In its grassroots sense, *sumak kawsay* continues to be a political platform for equality, redistribution of wealth, territory and self-governance for the Ecuadorian indigenous movements.

Blanca Chancosa (2020), former president of the ECUANARI, confirms that looking past its literal translation, *sumak kawsay* can be the “utopia that we [indigenous peoples] had in another time – of equality, respect for rights, that is, free education, health and housing”, but that it also includes the struggle against racism and discrimination. She thereby links *sumak kawsay* to the political struggles of the indigenous movement and of its political party, *Pachakutik*. The

interpretation of *sumak kawsay* as the spirituality of all human beings, however, escapes a neat political classification into left or right-wing politics. For the indigenous people I interviewed, *sumak kawsay* is not a concept but a political project. A “philosophy without philosophers”, if you will, that can open the door for emancipatory projects in terms of the economy, rights of nature, etc. (Acosta and Brand, 2018a, pp. 158–159). Chapter Seven consequently interrogates the political economy, gender politics, and political ontology of BV/sk. It thereby examines the implications of *sumak kawsay* as a political project, not a concept.

Chapter 7: *Sumak Kawsay* in Ecuador: Ecologies of Good

Living within Cosmological Limits to Growth

You see, these are the proposals that we have made. We propose life. Not death.

Cecilia Velasque, national sub-coordinator, Pachakutik³¹

In the previous chapter, I traced the political development of BV/sk in Ecuador from the 1980s onwards. I also situated BV/sk in the Anglophone and Spanish-language literature, while establishing my own approach to BV/sk as a grassroots, decolonial, and, ultimately, political project. In this chapter, I demonstrate how communities struggle to realise their own form of BV/sk in practice. In doing so, they challenge analytical categories of modern political theory and political economy. With a view to producing an inter-epistemic dialogue between degrowth and BV, Chapter Seven discusses the political economy, gender politics, and political ontology of BV. First, I argue that the political economy of BV/sk produces *affective abundance* through reciprocity with non-human communities. Second, I argue that paying attention to the gendered aspects of BV/sk highlights forms of re-existence within and despite interlinking patriarchies. Third, I argue that the world-making practices that constitute the political ontology of BV/sk delineate *cosmological limits to growth*. Finally, the concluding main section of this chapter examines some of the limitations of this notion and presents a preliminary conclusion. This chapter is followed by Chapter

³¹ *Pachakutik* (*Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik Nuevo País* - Plurinational Unity Movement) is a left-wing political party in Ecuador, and the political wing of the indigenous social movement comprised of CONAIE, ECUANARI, CONFENAIE and other umbrella organisations.

8, the conclusion to this thesis, which presents a decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth.

7.1. Affective Abundance: The Political Economy of Buen Vivir/ *sumak kawsay*

7.1.1. Bioeconomy revisited

BV/sk is often presented as an alternative to not just the neoliberal phase of capitalism, but capitalism itself (Acosta and Brand, 2018b, p. 20). These perspectives go beyond the conventional definition of capitalism as an economic system characterised by private ownership of production and the satisfaction of societal needs via the price mechanism (Gudynas, 2020, p. 39). From a critical, modernity/coloniality and onto-political Latin American perspective, capitalism is defined as the hegemonic economic system that relies on the commodification of labour, people and nature, as well as the relationships between them (Acosta and Brand, 2018b, p. 137; Gudynas, 2020, p. 39). Capitalism is furthermore considered to be both an economic and *cultural* system that generates and shapes subjectivities and modes of being, supported by an increasingly authoritarian ideology and totalising logic (Acosta and Brand, 2018b, p. 19; Escobar, 2020, p. xxi, 2007). Compared to the theorisation of capitalism, the political economy analysis of BV/sk has been less substantial and rigorous.

One analysis of the political economy of BV/sk has been made at the state level. René Ramírez (2010), former Secretary for Planning and Development in the Correa government and author of the National Development Plans for Good Living (2009-13 & 2013-17) set out the developmentalist, state version of the political

economy of BV. In this interpretation, BV is a form of 21st century socialism that takes a neo-Rostownian³², evolutionary shape: extractivism is necessary for the production of relational goods, and the first step towards selective import substitution and export diversification. Extraction revenues would be redistributed by the state and used to strengthen eco-tourism, agroecology and public investment before a transition to clean energy and a social solidarity economy can be made. The 2021 electoral programme of *correísta* candidate Andrés Arauz built on this interpretation, blending the constitutional twin mandates of *Buen Vivir* and the Rights of Nature with an ecomodernist vision of ostensibly “clean” energy infrastructure megaprojects (Arauz and Correa, 2020, pp. 2, 32, 35). The present analysis, however, is restricted to the literature and praxis that considers BV/sk as a decolonial, grassroots project.

This interpretation considers the political economy of BV/sk on a conceptual level. As such, it is built on efforts to dismantle the “capitalist rationality” and to instead reconstruct an “environmental rationality”, for example via the reappropriation of nature and the reterritorialization of cultures (Acosta and Brand, 2018b, p. 118). The political economy of BV/sk is closely associated with indigenous political ontologies, and therefore considered to be based on the values and practices of solidarity, reciprocity, complementarity, harmony and relationality (Acosta and Brand, 2018b, p. 118; García, 2016, pp. 39–40, 45). While these principles have been elaborated on elsewhere in this thesis, the following pages focus on their manifestation in the economic realm.

³² In *Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (2014 [1960]), Rostow proposes five stages of economic development dependent on Western technology and industrialisation pathways.

The vast literature yields no single, precise or systemic definition of what the conceptualisation of the economy based on the principles of BV/sk would look like. García (2016, pp. 45–49) lays out a general approach that is consistent with the literature. Most fundamentally, the principles of solidarity, reciprocity, plurality, complementarity etc. underpinning BV/sk promote non-capitalist, that is, communal forms of social relations and economic production. These subordinate the market to social and environmental wellbeing and the establishment of a communal equilibrium. The equilibria – within society, and between society and nature – illustrate another characteristic of the political economy of BV/sk: an analytical approach that does *not* separate economic activities from cultural, social and environmental ones. In addition to capitalism, this interpretation of BV/sk is also opposed to the state socialism variant of BV presented above.

These new patterns of consumption and production directed towards BV/sk would require the valuation of traditional knowledge and implementation of Rights of Nature (RoN). This ‘bioeconomy’ breaks with the nature/culture dichotomy, in that the former is protected regardless of economic value. Nature is not considered a resource, or capital, but patrimony and life giver. The fieldwork findings presented in this subsection on the political economy of BV/sk roughly map onto García’s synthesis, including caution about the reproduction of values that aren’t necessarily just reciprocal or communal, but perhaps can be characterised as utilitarian, or capitalist. The contribution of this thesis lies in reading the political economy of BV/sk from a degrowth perspective.

In doing so, the term 'bioeconomy' stands out immediately. It's reminiscent of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's (1975) work (see '2.2.3. A bioeconomic programme'). One of the central inspirations of the early degrowth literature, it proposes a decrease in general resource consumption, driven by a form of voluntary simplicity. Like BV/sk, it also advocated the subordination of the economy to social and ecological processes. Additionally, the bioeconomy of BV/sk also shares degrowth's focus on commons-based forms of production and a holistic analysis of the economy that incorporates social, aesthetics, ecological etc. values. There are a few differences, however, between the general conceptualisations of a degrowth economy and BV/sk's bioeconomy.

First, the political economy of BV/sk is operationalised at the collective, communal level. While this delivers an alternative to the individualised politics of neoliberal capitalism relevant to its geographical and political context, it also precludes a more sustained critique of the individual, high-consumption lifestyles that are taking hold not just in Ecuador's middle-classes, but across Latin America (Acosta and Brand, 2018b, p. 127). Consequently, the bioeconomy of BV/sk does not explicitly call for what would amount to degrowth – the dematerialisation, decommodification and decentralisation of the economy (Ibid, p. 120). Given that the growing ecological footprint of the Ecuadorian economy is approaching near total biocapacity (El Universo, 2019; Ministerio del Ambiente del Ecuador, 2013), these analyses should not be dismissed. The quantification of resource use and its sustainable levels, as done by degrowth, merits increased attention by the theorists and practitioners of BV/sk.

Second, the bioeconomy of BV/sk is embedded in the natural world not just from a natural capital or ecosystems services perspective (as it is arguably in the degrowth literature, see Chapter Five), but a spiritual, social and political perspective. Chapter Five has indicated the ways in which the degrowth critique could benefit from non-Anthropocentric perspectives. The proceeding subsections also highlight the contributions to this argument found in my interview participants' responses. The economic praxis of BV/sk lies in the community solidarity economy. Consequently, the following subsections explore patterns of reciprocity and solidarity within my fieldwork data, as well as present some of the other themes that emerged.

7.1.2. Community Solidarity Economy

My indigenous interviewees are community members, social leaders, and politicians. For them, *sumak kawsay* is living in harmony, that is, in a caring and relational way, with oneself and others – including Mother Nature, one's family and community. For the women active in the Ecuadorian indigenous political movement, BV/sk is also a collective contribution, by the indigenous movement, and a demand to change the economic system on authority of “not just of one person, but that of the *pueblos*”, as put to me by Blanca Chancosa. BV/sk in economic terms means, for example, resisting mineral and oil and gas extraction, or monoculture plantations of teak wood, bamboo, or soy. As such, the most important premise of the political economy of BV/sk is the re-situation of the economy at the service of human and non-human life, rather than macroeconomic equilibria, economic growth, and export and investment quotas (Acosta, 2020). The fundamental condition to do so is the strengthening of

community and community relations in order to move away from a world of competing and self-interested individuals (Ibid). This chapter's last main section and conclusion, '7.4. Limits to Cosmological Limits to Growth: A Preliminary Conclusion', explores some of the constraints of this approach. The community, however, is also the central political economy element of *sumak kawsay*. Based on a cosmology that favours complementarity over competition and human interaction with nature based on reciprocity, *sumak kawsay* is a fundamentally anti-capitalist proposal.

Its theory of value transcends anthropocentric foci points (exchange in neoclassical economics; labour value in Marxism; energy in energy economics etc). Instead, the economy of *sumak kawsay* is guided by the intrinsic value of human, non-human and spiritual life, independent of its utility for humans (Acosta, 2020). This includes indigenous – Kichwa – ontologies and epistemological principles. If mountains, rivers, lagoons as well as the air and the wind are considered social (and possibly political actors), then the value of a product such as corn is embedded in the intricate ecological and spiritual relations of the *chakra*.³³ Of course, that isn't to say that indigenous communities operate, or aim to operate entirely outside the market economy. Neither does that mean that these rivers, hills or mountains exist apart from humans. Indeed, Churuchumbi's (2014) central thesis is that there's a utilitarian perspective to – at least the Cayambe people's – use of *alli kawsay*. Nature has intrinsic value in itself, but it is also judged by its usefulness for humans, which arises from the economic history of the Cayambe

³³ Etymologically of quichua origins, the *chakra* is more than just an allotment. It means 'a space to cultivate' and typically refers to the materially and symbolically productive space that is the centre of communal and family life (FAO, 2020).

people as an agricultural society. Plants are excellent (*alli*) if they serve as food (Churuchumbi, 2014, p. 67). Water is good if it's clean and if there's plenty of it. Strong winds and rains that could lead to soil erosion, on the other hand, are considered punishments from Mother Earth; therefore, to live well is to avoid the ire of the hills (Ibid, pp. 71-72). This dependence creates reciprocal relationships, which are maintained through veneration and respect paid through offerings, amongst others.

Natural and human, physical and spiritual dimensions are all intertwined. The Cayambe pueblo itself, however, isn't just engaged in subsistence agriculture: "one has to create employment, as they say" (Chancosa, 2020). To generate income in Latin America's most urbanised country amidst high levels of informal employment (ILO, 2014, pp. 4–5), these natural and human, physical and spiritual dimensions need to be integrated into the market economy "*without* losing the community economy" (Chancosa, 2020). The economy envisioned by the indigenous organisations of Ecuador coalesce around the markings of what Acosta and Guijarro (2018) have proposed to call a post-economy, centred on the reproduction of life within a socioecological and humanist rationality (as opposed to a capitalist one). As such, economic practices would have to rest on the premise that all beings are of equal value, "regardless of their "utility" or "labour"" (Acosta and Guijarro, 2018, own translation).

The indigenous and worker's movements' proposal for an economy that sits within the remit of BV/sk is *economía popular y solidaria* – the Community Solidarity Economy (CSE) (CONAIE, 2012, pp. 35–36; Velasque, 2020). The term CSE loosely

denominates a set of collective, non-capitalist, reciprocal economic practices in Latin America. Academically, it has no clear theoretical outline yet, with analyses characterised by economic reductionism and an absence of historical and/or structural explanations for its emergence (Gómez, 2013; López and Marañón, 2010). This piece does not contribute to CSE scholarship, as it would be beyond this study's remit. There is, however, an interesting interplay and indeed tension between the CSE proposed by the indigenous movement, and the "Social Solidarity Economy" (SSE) that is promoted in the country's constitution, and that is worth analysing.

From 2009, the SSE has been the country's official economic system, geared toward a dynamic but harmonious relationship between society, state and market. It includes all forms of public, private and mixed organisations, including the popular and solidary sectors (Ecuador Const., 2008, chap. 4). The institutionalisation of the SSE has been driven by social movements and their intermediaries, going back to early 20th century cooperative traditions (for a detailed overview of that process, see Rivera and Lemaître, 2016). The popular and solidary sectors, sub-sectors of the SSE, include the cooperative, associative, communitarian and informal and subsistence sectors (Jaramillo and Jácome, 2019). Therefore, the "Popular and Solidary Economy" is a term used by the Ecuadorian state to denominate the design and implementation of a series of government plans toward these sectors. There is an overlap between the "Popular and Solidary Economy" and BV/sk, in that both are built on the principles of solidarity, cooperation, reciprocity and complementarity (Rivera and Lemaître, 2016). The government recognises as much and in 2011 passed the Law of the

Community and Solidarity Economy and Finance Sector (LOEPS; *Ley Orgánica de la Economía Popular y Solidaria y del Sector Financiero Popular y Solidario*).

LOEPS recognises the “Popular and Solidary Economy” as form of economic organisation, in which

individual or collective actors organise processes of production, exchange, selling, financing and consumption of goods and services to satisfy needs and generate income, based on relations of solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity, prioritising work and the human being as subject and end of said activities that are geared towards Buen Vivir, in harmony with nature over appropriation, luxury and the accumulation of capital (LOEPS, 2011, p. 2).

The LOEPS’ objective was to strengthen the CSE and its relation to other sectors in the economy, strengthen the practices of CSE in the communities to allow their economic production to contribute towards BV/sk , and regulate the norms and rights of the subjects of the law. In reality, however, cooperatives and other democratic economic organisations have been harassed and bullied, like the Alianza Solidaria housing cooperative in Quito (Melo, 2020). Indeed, since the LOEPS was passed, subsequent governments have pursued “utterly centralized, hierarchic and technocratic” *Buen Vivir* policies that “aim at maximum control, stability through social and public management-type planning and accountability, while regarding every opposing force as threat” (Waldmüller, 2014). Furthermore, LOEPS sits within the socialist framing of the government BV/sk, and therefore doesn’t break with the utilitarian and anthropocentric relation to nature.

In contrast, the Community Solidarity Economy (CSE) differs from the state approach to the political economy of BV/sk. CONAIE’s 2012 to 2024 governance plan lays out CSE as one aspect of its “community economics” proposal. Rather than a market society, the CONAIE demands “a society with markets in plural”

(Acosta, 2010, p. 25, own translation). The proposal embeds territorial autonomy within economic demands around the “microeconomy” of the community economy. Concrete demands include guarantee of food sovereignty and subsidies for industrial, agricultural production based on relations of reciprocity, solidarity and redistribution (CONAIE, 2012, pp. 26–39). A subsequent document published seven years later, builds on these proposals more concretely.

The “Alternative Economic Proposal” was delivered by a “Parliament of the People” that was convened by the CONAIE in response to Decree 883, the phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies, and subsequent socioeconomic crisis. The 2019 October uprising began as a transport worker’s strike but was leveraged by the indigenous movement to demand holistic reforms in education, health, labour, fiscal politics and taxation, etc. (Chancosa, 2020). The “Parliament of the People” consisted of representatives of the peasant, student, indigenous, teacher and worker’s movements. Its final document, the “Alternative Economic Proposal” departed from the assumption that the economy isn’t an objective in and of itself, but an instrument to generate wellbeing in a peaceful environment. As such, society cannot be sacrificed in the pursuit of complying with economic growth indicators that do not respect labour rights and the rights of nature. Furthermore, wealth is created by the plurinational society, and specifically peasants, indigenous, students, microentrepreneurs, autonomous workers, women, professionals, young, students etc. The document, however, claims that this wealth isn’t shared between them and that instead, these sectors they are being impoverished (CONAIE, 2019, pp. 6–7). Their concrete proposal consists of fiscal,

credit and monetary measures that could significantly raise tax income without affecting the most vulnerable sectors of society.

Beyond monetary, fiscal and sectoral politics, however, the proposal also stressed the role of community economics. It demands support for small producers, such as traditional fishers. The 12 mile sovereign zone in the Pacific and the 40 mile zone around the Galapagos archipelago should exclusively be dedicated to those activities to guarantee food sovereignty, control overfishing and sanction industrial fishing violating that zone (CONAIE, 2019, p. 14). Furthermore, the large-scale consolidation of working-class markets that trade in traditional, handcraft products by small-scale artists, peasants, fishers would remove excessive reliance on intermediaries while communal supply centres would guarantee fair prices and remove intermediaries, speculation, as well as control contraband (Ibid, p. 15). In short, the alternative economic proposal suggests the creation and strengthening of local and regional markets – in the plural – as a way of resisting the dependence on and exposure to the fluctuations, instabilities, and environmentally and socially harmful supply chains of the global market. This theme has been a recurrent one throughout my fieldwork and will be discussed in the following subsection.

Neither the CSE as proposed by the CONAIE, nor the SSE supported by the Ecuadorian state can be claimed to represent *the* political economy of BV/sk. However, both the CONAIE's governance plan and "Alternative Economic Proposal" acknowledges the spiritual dimension of BV/sk, which differentiates it from systemic alternatives from the North such as degrowth. The political

economy of BV/sk is built on both the material, as well as the *spiritual* means of (re-)production:

Defending nature is defending the life of the tree as my own. There is the spirituality. And the economy (Chancosa, 2020).

The Parliament of the People's proposal acknowledges this spiritual aspect, amongst others (production, food, recreation, sports), as part of the plurinational character of state (CONAIE, 2019, p. 17). This spiritual relation with nature demands that the economy is built on sufficiency and human needs which are framed by spiritual, as well as material needs. The following subsection, as well as main section '7.3. Cosmological limits to growth: The Political Ontology of Sumak Kawsay', explore how spirituality shapes cosmological limits to growth.

7.1.3. Reciprocity and solidarity in practice

Reciprocity and solidarity are the basis for community economics, as described in the political proposals of the CONAIE (2012). Reciprocity is also the basis of the relationship between indigenous members of a community, whether in relationship to money, goods or services (Ferraro, 2004, chap. 3). There are long and ongoing anthropological debates about the economy of reciprocity, gifts and community and family ties. Following anthropological evidence from the Andes, the following example of *Sumak Mikuna* operationalises reciprocity as a world-making practice that aims to produce an equilibrium in the social, and, arguably, natural worlds (de la Torre and Sandoval, 2004). Reciprocal relations between community members do not aim to eliminate inequality. Indeed, reciprocity is the mechanism by which the social order is reproduced, including inequalities and hierarchies (Ferraro, 2004, pp. 44–45, 80–84). Reciprocal practices

do, however, intend to ameliorate the negative effects of inequality, as well as strengthen community ties, social structures and intrafamily relations.

Sumak Mikuna: reciprocity and food production

These reciprocal practices are central to living in a community. At the very least, reciprocity functions at the very basic level of food security for my participants: “if you aren’t there for the harvest, then you help peeling potatoes later. And you have food already” (Chancosa, 2020). BV/sk is also framed within the solidarity and sharing of food and medicine. Food is produced for a surplus, but that doesn’t require monoculture production. The Agroecological Women’s Association of Sumak Mikuna (“Excellent Food”) is situated in El Tambo County, Cañar province. They produce a variety of vegetables, including amaranth, without agrochemicals. Amaranth is an ancestral seed that isn’t consumed much in Ecuador anymore, having lost significance compared to rice and quinoa. It’s at risk of being lost altogether.

Sumak Mikuna’s production doesn’t cover their own food requirements entirely, but they formed an association to secure access to markets, cut intermediaries and negotiate prices. Lack of resources, such as harvest machines or money for transport to markets, as well as capacity-building for their members remain their biggest challenges. Yet, over the years, they have built up a supra-regional sales network that reaches the Ecuadorian coast. Their practice of solidarity and reciprocity amongst the associates is hampered by the large geographical area over which their chakras and homes are distributed, and the fact that they haven’t yet been able to acquire communal plots. If the association could acquire a certain

type of harvest machine, for example, this would be shared by all the associates. Additionally, because the associates tend to produce very similar products, exchange of product for product is impractical. However, non-monetary exchange based on solidarity (the principle of *ranti ranti*) does take place when travelling to other provinces or regions, for example to the province of Azuay or to the coast, where sellers are offering different produce. This non-commercial exchange is for the associate's own consumption. Their agroecological practices respect Pachamama as a mother who gives and nurtures life. At the same time, the women of Sumak Mikuna raise awareness for healthier food, which for them is ancestral food such as amaranth or quinoa. They sell their amaranth bars in school to guarantee the nutrition of their communities' children.

In addition to interviewing the associates of Sumak Mikuna, I had the privilege of witnessing the carnival celebration during *Paucar Huatay*, or the end of the solar year in February. Carnival celebrations in Ecuador take place across the country, not just indigenous communities. The Cañari *pueblo*, however, celebrate with a large procession of their communities in the central squares of Cañari towns, preceded by the rituals performed in the early morning in the communities themselves. In El Tambo, Sumak Mikuna cooperative members provided the dancers with food and chicha as the procession approached the town square. I was able to witness the enormous amount of work and care the association's women – and men, in a true prefiguration of the horizontal and complementary duality desired by communitarian feminists – put into providing the food and drink (Photo 7.1). After the procession had passed, the members – and I – shared the rest of the food and drink before cleaning up together.



Photo 7.1 Members of *Sumak Mikuna* distribute food and *chicha* to the carnival procession

Afterwards, we walked to a more remote community location, where a stage and sound system, as well as a panel of judges hosted a friendly competition between the county's 13 communities. Each community presented a rehearsed dance and song in gratitude for the harvest. On that day, I argue that according to the parameters established in this chapter, I was able to witness and participate in a confluence of practices, traditions, knowledges and relational ontologies that together produced a real-world utopia of Buen Vivir/ *sumak kawsay*. The carnival celebrations show how “*sumak kawsay* does not correspond to existing analytical and planning boundaries that separate political economy and culture” (Radcliffe, 2015b, p. 275). To be more precise, I witnessed what Lechón (2017) has called the

alli kawsay de la sierra, or the Good Living of the (Andean) highlands: the form of life of the Cañaris, which is built on intimate relations and interaction with non-human nature, strong community bonds as well as their own traditions, culture, and economic activities. *Alli kawsay de la sierra* was expressed in the early morning rituals, the celebration of indigenous culture, dress and tradition, and the enactment of reciprocity and solidarity within and across communities. And perhaps not least in the exuberant consumption of alcohol and the playful, if liberal distribution of foam in everyone's face.

Minga as Buen Vivir and migration as threat to it

One of the recurring themes of the interviews was *minga*, a practice of collective labour of communal interest. On the one hand, it was portrayed as survival strategy since colonial times. On the other hand, as a fundamental aspect of life in community and *Buen Vivir* itself:

Here, the community has to go to the *mingas*, we have to do it. Everything is *minga*! But that is beautiful, this is the community. This is *minga*. This is the *Buen Vivir* that I mean.

The *minga* is founded in the Kichwa principles of “el Ama Llulla [“you shall not lie”], el Ama Shua [“you shall not steal”], el Ama Quella [“you shall not be lazy”]”, which are also anchored in the 2008 constitution as personal responsibilities of all Ecuadorians (Ecuador Const., 2008, Art. 83, par. 2). *Minga* is the principal institution of indigenous reciprocity and basis of Andean social organisation (de la Torre and Sandoval, 2004, p. 29). *Mingas* are now practiced in mestizo and indigenous communities alike, in both rural and urban areas. In many communities, they are carried out to maintain the irrigation channels that channel water from the highland moors and mountains into communities. Given that its

goal is to maintain the natural and social equilibrium, I argue that doing *minga* represents BV/sk in practice.

Migration, however, poses a threat to this practice. The communities of Zhiña, El Tambo, and Saraguro, are located in the poorer Southern provinces. There, migration challenges the patterns of reciprocity and solidarity that frame the social order. From conversations I had there, it became clear that returning emigrees from Spain or the USA often have the resources to buy land and build houses. Many of these emigrees do not consider themselves indigenous anymore, but mestizo, or white. That change in identity is often accompanied by changes in their relationship with the community, and the expectation that their rights to luxury and consumer products, and above all, private property, be upheld. That often leads to conflicts within those communities that communally decide on the construction of new houses on their land, as well as their architecture. Large, concrete houses with pools often aren't welcomed in communities that rely on collective labour and solidarity to survive.

In El Tambo, the migration of men often leaves behind women and children. Women therefore have to find work in the fields and elsewhere, which affects the *mingas* as well. This is particular problematic if there aren't enough people to carry out the canal *mingas*, which maintain the irrigation canals on which the communities' water supply depends. In Zhiña, the dairy cooperative "Zhiñarejita Lácteos", which produces organic yoghurts, cheeses and milk at a higher price than their non-organic competitors, have to struggle not only for market shares of their products, but also against returnees. Returning migrants are pushing in the

other direction in terms of buying up land, constructing luxury houses and arguing against the producer's association. From what was relayed during a field trip to the organic dairy factory in Zhiña, the members of the association are seen as backward for their reliance on principles of solidarity and reciprocity. In fact, their industrial production facilities had been funded by the National Programme for Buen Vivir and were everything but "backward" in that sense. The cultural relativism and internalised racism of the returnee was thus hampering practices of solidarity and reciprocity. Lang (2018, pp. 33–34) observes a similar conflict of values in Zhiña, between (indigenous) returnees who espouse a material conception of wellbeing and often manipulate the communal way of life of those who stayed and shape their way of life around the principles of BV/sk. That is, a focus on living in harmony with oneself, the community and nature that is opposed to Western development-as-growth.

To sum up, reciprocity and solidarity are the moral basis for the community and solidarity economy, that is, the political economy of BV/sk in practice. Both rely on a redefinition of wealth, not defined by the amount of material resources, goods or levels of consumption (Melo, 2020). The political economy of BV/sk stipulates that wealth is in the land and in the territory, their human wealth, productive and mineral wealth, wealth of water and soil, as remarked on by one of my interviewees:

Wealth for us is the harmonious coexistence of all the elements that are part of Mother Nature.

Respect for water sources. Respect for mineral deposit sites because they also fulfil a function. They're energy. In these beings, we meditate. They're our spiritual centres. It's not that the gold or silver within doesn't fulfil any function. For us, it's religious, in Western terms. It's the spiritual part of the human being and the land that is concentrate there because all of the significance, the

energy draws us to the places of the gold, the minerals. So yes, in the moment in which there's respect for *Buen Vivir*, for *sumak kawsay*, which isn't a discourse, the *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* that isn't material but both spiritual and material at the same time. In this moment we would be in effect implementing what *Buen Vivir* and *alli kawsay* mean in reality (Velasque, 2020).

The economy – consisting of plural, local markets – is thereby framed by the production of spiritual wealth and material wellbeing. The political economy of BV/sk therefore also mobilises the redistribution of products and non-pecuniary wealth: to give is to generate friendship and feelings, based on reciprocity and complementarity (Cochi, 2017). This type of affective and spiritual abundance is fundamentally opposed to the economic rationality of capitalism – it shows up the limits to economic production long before ecological limits may be breached. Good living, or *Buen Vivir*, subsequently isn't just about being fed, it encompasses being part of a community of human, spiritual, or earth-beings that share not just economic benefits, but what I call *psychological wellbeing through relational justice*.

Sumak kawsay and international political economy

The political economy of *sumak kawsay* isn't restricted to the local, or even national level. The reciprocity and solidarity of *sumak kawsay* can also be expressed on an international level. At the time of my interviews, in February 2020, a locust plague threatened to cause wide-spread famine in East Africa. For my interviewees, the response from a Community Solidarity Economy perspective was clear: to send food to African countries and communities in need (Chancosa, 2020; Velasque, 2020). Furthermore, they were adamant that international trade agreements could be negotiated using indigenous knowledges and a CSE framework. Thereby, Ricardo's comparative advantage could be used not for

commercial competition, but as international exchange outside the monetary system:

If in our country we have an excess production in certain food items that other countries don't have, we could exchange a certain number of tons for something else that we need here. [...]

What could Africa give us [Ecuador]? I'm not saying that they need to give me anything. They [would] eat [our] corn, wouldn't they? In turn for petrol, we'll send medical staff or teachers, with an appropriate methodology [...]. This is solidarity, but also community economics. When money doesn't work, but the necessity of giving from one to another (Chancosa, 2020).

International trade treaties could be negotiated following the logic of reciprocity and solidarity and community economics: half of the treaty could consist of product exchanges outside the logic of the market and the monetary system, and the other of commercial import and export, as Blanca Chancosa suggests (2020). However, reciprocity and solidarity can also be practiced at the municipal level, as done during the rule of Pachakutik in the county Nabón in the Southern province of Azuay.

In Nabón, as well as Cayambe, local state institutions, under the political leadership of Pachakutik and Nabón canton's first female municipal mayor, Amelia Erraez (2000-2009) and Magali Quezada (2009-2018), facilitated the transformation of people from the – colonial or otherwise – category of citizens into *collective* social and political actors. A large aspect of this transformation was the commoning of decision-making processes, resource governance, and justice, as well as the de-patriarchalisation of politics (Lang, 2018). Public-communitarian partnerships forego a dependency-creating, top-down welfare state but instead provide infrastructure or technical expertise that allow the communities to generate their well-being collectively. In Cayambe, I attended a municipal

engagement event during a field trip, which showed that a similar process is under way there. The municipality provides the resources and technology for planting trees or collecting rubbish, for example, while community members perform the tasks themselves (Novoa, 2020). These practices implement principles of solidarity and reciprocity, and demonstrate the different levels at which they can be practiced.³⁴

In terms of one of degrowth's research agenda-defining questions of how "collectives and movements undo growth in practice, and [how they] unsettle its imaginary" (Kallis, 2018, p. 188), the postcolonial setting of Ecuador and Bolivia makes this issue more complex. Economic growth as social objective is but one aspect of the modern/colonial nation state. Communities that build their specific vision for a life in plenitude will have to unsettle more than economic growth in practice, as Lang's (2018) work on for example the patriarchal politics in Nabón has shown. These communities have built their specific vision for a life in plenitude while unsettling development-as-growth, patriarchy, racism etc. in practice. The examples of Cayambe and Nabón also exemplify successful cooperation of mestizo and indigenous communities, and how the former adapted communitarian practices associated with the latter. Similarly, the Alianza Solidaria housing cooperative in the North of Quito contributes to undoing the mechanistic understanding of nature, as well as the logics of economic growth and capital. In adopting *minga* as one of their fundamental principles, they also adapted

³⁴ Despite these changes that were broadly accepted by the communities across the canton of Nabón, *Pachakutik* lost the 2019 municipal elections (Simbaña, 2020). In Cayambe, Guillermo Churuchumbi, author of a thesis (2014) on the daily use of *sumak kawsay* in Cayambe, has been re-elected as county mayor for *Pachakutik* in 2019.

communitarian practices associated with indigenous and rural communities. The following pages explore the details.

The Alianza Solidaria cooperative housing project

The example of the Alianza Solidaria housing cooperative demonstrates how BV/sk isn't just a practice of the countryside, or even of the indigenous populations of Ecuador. Two of my interviewees were the founding members of the cooperative *Cooperativa de Vivienda Alianza Solidaria* (COOVIAS) or Alianza Solidaria. Over the past twenty years, its members successfully recuperated land that borders two ravines. Around these ravines, they constructed social housing with a cooperative business model ('Solidaridad Quitumbe'). Their approach was innovative for a number of reasons. First, ravines are associated with poverty and social exclusion in Quito, so are usually filled up to make room for football fields or other uses. However, when members of the Alianza Solidaria housing cooperative bought the land from the municipality, they worked to recover the rubbish-filled ravines, constructing the houses with views towards them, instead, as is customary, facing away from the ravines. Their co-ownership model furthermore divided the Solidaridad Quitumbe's recovered land into neighbourhood plots, rather than individual ones, which required citizen's organisation in order to gain municipality permits for the cooperative land ownership. It also required negotiating joint responsibility agreements with public institutions to secure water supply, sewage systems and paving works (Riera et al., 2020, pp. 130–131). The Alianza Solidaria project is built on three central axes: social organisation, the environment and education.

The Solidaridad Quitumbe project sits right next to Quito's busiest transnational and international bus station, Quitumbe. Yet, on the paths towards the houses, next to buzzing bees, native trees and plants, as well as a beach at the bottom of the ravine, the traffic noise and fumes have all but disappeared (Photo 7.2). To some, it's known as the "*barrio de Buen Vivir*", or the neighbourhood of Good Living. For founding member Sandra Lopez (2020, 2014, p. 29), the only way to achieve *Buen Vivir* is through social organisation and cooperative self-management that guarantees solidarity within and outside the community, as well as with nature. According to her (2020), COOVIAS had been working towards *Buen Vivir* well before the arrival of the Correa government. In the face of various political pressures to give up parts of their land, or to disband the cooperative entirely (Melo, 2020), Lopez insists that their self-built project will be defended, not because it is in the constitution, but because *Buen Vivir* is a right. She also hints at *Buen Vivir's* existence as a theory before the constitution, as COOVIAS have been working with and towards it for the last twenty years.



Photo 7.2 The view towards Quitumbe bus station from the walkways of Solidaridad Quitumbe

The ecological restoration of the ravines and the building of Ecuador's first bicycle path on Solidaridad Quitumbe's land was achieved through "reciprocal and solidary actions" (Riera et al., 2020, p. 133), that is, *mingas*, or collective labour. In the process of obtaining housing in the cooperative, each member has to complete 120 hours of *minga* and 120 hours of environmental education. Each Sunday is spent doing *minga*, and in case there is no work to do, Sundays are spent in reflection instead. As rural migrants who've come to the city, the cooperative members have brought countryside practices of reciprocity embedded in ecological cycles to the city and to the social construction of habitat (Riera et al., 2020). The concept of the habitat considers the environment holistically and recognises that to live well, public space, access to ecosystem

services and the possibility of convivial relation within the neighbourhood are as important as having a physical shelter. The implementation of the CSE by COOVIAS continues beyond the construction of housing, or habitat. One of the new constructions will house an indoor market for an exchange between the countryside and the city, where producers can come to sell their products within the frame of the community and solidarity economy.

The market as obstacle to the political economy of sumak kawsay

This main section has made repeated reference to the re-localisation of the economy in the form of a “market plurality” at the local and regional level as an important aspect of the political economy of BV/sk. However, the market itself is often the very obstacle to BV/sk in practice. Again and again interviewees have reported their difficulties in finding a market for their arts and crafts products, or of being unable to access supra-regional markets and/or sell their agroecological produce to traders or the end consumer. Agroecological, organic production of vegetables, livestock or dairy has higher costs than agrochemical production, which necessarily results in higher prices. Producers are often directly told by vendors or traders that they do not care about the quality, just quantity – against which agroecological production cannot compete. Depending on the season, prices fluctuate too, so that producers will have to accept selling at a loss. Yet, for my participants, solidarity and reciprocity are the responses to the seasonality of income and profit:

Because us women, we help each other shoulder to shoulder. That we find a way together, supporting each other. And that we buy from each other. They say, [...] I need that, I'll buy it from you. And from there, my friend wants more, can we make another one? Yes, I will. In this way, we pave the way to support each other.

Often, however, solidarity in the community isn't enough for a business to survive. In Cayambe, amongst others, the large base of agroecological producers easily self-organised cultivation, harvesting and production. Entering the market, however, has been much more difficult. It turns out that the main consumer for these products is the state, in the form of municipal bureaucracies who bulk purchase products (Simbaña, 2020). Local markets are an ideal, therefore, that in reality, and as has been proposed by CONAIE, depend on protection measures and subsidies – most often by local government. The dependency on a state that, despite being constitutionally mandated to, has so far refused to protect the SSE and CSE, reveals the limits of CSE and other solidary economic practices without major institutional changes. Nevertheless, the examples analysed in this subsection, '7.1.3. Reciprocity and solidarity in practice', have demonstrated that the political economy of *sumak kawsay* is grounded in the production of affective and material abundance – not for individual gain but collective wellbeing. Political will, bureaucratic structures and central government politics however often hinder the emergence and protection of local markets and the CSE. Having analysed the political economy of BV/sk in practice, the next main section of this chapter examines the gender politics of BV/sk.

7.2. Re-existence and the reproduction of life: The Gender Politics of *Buen Vivir/ Sumak Kawsay*

7.2.1. The constitutional politics of feminism vs. the return of conservative agendas

Theoretically, the fieldwork's gender analysis is based on decolonial feminisms and historical analyses of the colonality of gender, as laid out in Chapter Five. First of all, I consider them most relevant "for the utopian and political potential of *Buen Vivir* from the space of Abya Yala" (Zaragocin, 2017, pp. 17–18). Both motivate the present research framework. Secondly, hybridising, as it were, decolonial feminisms and BV/sk fills a gap in the latter's literature (Ibid). Before embarking on a decolonial, feminist analysis of BV/sk, however, the following paragraphs briefly analyse the Ecuadorian context of women's rights and gender politics following the 2008 constitution.

The majority of feminist interventions on BV and the 2008 constitution focus on feminist economics and ecofeminism, and public policy or legal analyses (I. León, 2010; León, 2008; M. León, 2010; Manosalvas, 2017; Tapia, 2016; Ugalde, 2017, 2015). For degrowth, this is immensely interesting, since despite promoting an economy of care, its initial debates lacked substantial engagement with the gendered nature of labour, energy use and GHG emissions, consumption etc. (see main section '4.2. Depatriarchalising Degrowth'). In the years during and shortly after the constituent assembly, discussions around BV/sk and gender were driven by an economy of care framework and a proposed redefinition of the economy towards a social solidarity economy (see León, 2008). Magdalena León (2008), for

example, co-author to the first National Plan for Good Living (PNBV 2009-2013) interprets BV as a critique of classical and neoclassical economics inspired by feminist and ecological economics. She advances arguments against the privatisation of care, for the democratisation of the economy and recuperation of food sovereignty, as well as a redefinition of production and consumption in materialist terms. This framework recognises and attempts to overcome the irreconcilable contradictions between capitalism and the processes that guarantee the reproduction of life (Fernández and Santillana, 2019). In order to safeguard these processes, the constitution represents an attempt to challenge the sexual division of labour and the consignment of reproductive work to non-renumerated labour.

In accordance with this feminist economic framework, the constitution (Art. 333) recognises non-renumerated care and domestic work performed inside homes as productive labour, mandating state-provisioned childcare, flexible working hours, infrastructure etc. Everyone who performs care work qualifies for universal welfare support (Art. 369), regardless of their employment situation. This unique constitutional valuation of care work breaks with the capitalist production model that relies on the sexual division of labour, that is, the non-renumerated performance of reproductive and care work by (mostly) women (Pardo, 2019). In reality, however, women in Ecuador today continue to perform about four times as many hours of care work as men (Ibid). The constitution wasn't followed up with secondary legislation that would have challenged women's roles as mothers and carers (Quinchiguango, 2018, chap. 5.2, 6).

Furthermore, no structural changes have been made to the (neo)extractivist economic model of Ecuador. This development model exacerbates gendered violence, including prostitution, trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls in mining areas (Svampa, 2019, pp. 76–78). Following the radical mandate of the 2008 constitution, the disappointing praxis of the economy of care in Ecuador may hold some clues for degrowth. Degrowth discussions seem to be stuck in a perpetual debate of how to best deal with the state (or not). Electoral politics, even if they may lead to the widely desired (or not) state capture, will have to grapple with economically and *socially* conservative forces that oppose an anti-capitalist and feminist agenda.

The 2019 US\$4.2 billion IMF loan agreement and subsequent neoliberal austerity politics further exacerbated women's subordination. Secondary legislation has reduced the 2020 state budget for the prevention of violence against women by almost 80% to US\$876,000, while almost half of the Victims of Violence Protection Service has been made redundant (Fernández and Santillana, 2019). These measures are situated within a context of increased precarity, private debt and unemployment (*ibid*), all of which are likely to increase domestic violence and violence against women. One of my interview participants illustrates the multiple failures of the Ecuadorian state to protect women from domestic violence:

Yes, I have experienced violence with my husband. I have lived with psychological, physical violence, all of it. [...] It was such an abuse.

Rather than being able to access support, she experienced economic hardship and discrimination for being a single mother of 8 after the death of her husband. In 2005, a male director terminated her contract as a civil servant because she had a

child after her husband had died. Since then, she has used her medicinal knowledge and skills, her *chakra* and animal husbandry, as well as sales of artisanry to provide for herself and her children. Her story is one of re-existence in the tradition of the decolonial feminisms from Abya Yala. It will be told in full in the next subsection.

The entrance of discourses that centre the reproduction of life in mainstream policies and constitutional debates would not have been possible without the arrival of women on the national political stage. By 2016, women occupied 40% of all national political positions (Pardo, 2019). The main protagonists of what I call *Correísmo* feminism in Ecuador were academic (white/mestizo) socialist feminist economists who were part of the Correa government. Their interpretation of BV/sk makes the case for economic diversification that centres the economy of care instead of capitalist production modes, as the previous analysis showed.

The feminist economics or even ecological economics interpretation of BV/sk, however, does not guarantee or make reference to territorial and plurinational rights of indigenous peoples and other groups (see León, 2008). This lopsided interpretation is in contradiction to the plurinational character of the constitution itself, and ignores those indigenous and mestizo communities' cooperative and solidarity economic structures and proposals that are put in practice from the bottom-up, rather than the state. On the other hand, privileging the state as the primary political actor over private enterprises and social movements is typical of *Correísmo* in general, not just *Correísmo* feminism. According to the latter, patriarchy would be overcome if women had access to resources, land and the

factors of production. That isn't to say that those things wouldn't benefit women, but that, as decolonial feminists would argue, the majority of non-white and non-middleclass women in Ecuador face multiple discriminations at the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality etc. Nevertheless, the Correa government's period of conservative restoration (2012-2017; Ortíz, 2015), as well as Moreno's return to neoliberal politics have foreclosed any type of socialist feminism from gaining traction in mainstream policy and political debates.

In addition to the conservative post-constitution public policies, the 2008 constitution itself harboured contradictions with regards to its gender politics. It seems that the legal and ethnic pluralism expressed in the radical environmentalism of RoN and plurinationality/interculturality displaces human plurality at the individual level. The constitutional mandate of BV/sk as a set of rights for example does not interrogate dominant gender ideologies. Amongst others, there are no provisions for same-sex marriage and adoption. The constitutional articles that *do* enshrine (individual) women's rights (57 and 171) were included after a collective of indigenous women from Chimborazo (REDMUJCH) fought to integrate their perspectives on BV/sk in the constitution. Nevertheless, the second part of their proposal – to understand BV/sk as a critical epistemology in the fight against gendered violence – was rejected by the constituent assembly (Castillo, 2017, p. 33). On the one hand, demanding rights for (indigenous) women within a BV/sk framework was perceived as "*individual rights*" and therefore as threatening to newly won *collective rights* and the collective identity of indigenous peoples by the indigenous groups themselves (Castillo, 2017, p. 33). On the other hand, liberal feminists considered any

demands for indigenous autonomy as a setback for women's rights (Ibid). The BV/sk literature doesn't much discuss why the 2008 constitution includes radical environmental and plurinational politics, but no radical feminist politics and/or women's rights. However, some clues may be found in this polarisation within the gender discourse in Ecuador, which has resulted in the rejection of the REDMUJCH proposal, as well proposals on abortion, for example.

After Correa threatened to resign during the constitutive process, feminists withdrew their demand to legalise abortion for *all* pregnancies from rape, not just pregnancies following rape of 'mentally disabled' women (eugenic abortion) (Tapia, 2016). Some argue that the prescription of a legal process for offences against vulnerable groups which includes family and sexual violence and hate crimes (Article 81) hasn't been brought about by considering the decolonial principles of BV/sk, but liberal human rights discourses from the late 1990s onwards (Tapia, 2016). The constitution thereby articulates a liberal framework for gender equality. It reframes gender relations in terms of discrimination, rather than oppressive power relations (Ugalde, 2015). Policies set out in the National Development Plans for Buen Vivir (PNBV 2009-2013 & 2013-2017) have cemented this discourse in mandating parity targets for elected positions, equal opportunities and mother's (as opposed to women's) rights in the workplace etc. (Ugalde, 2015; for a detailed analysis of the implications of the PNBV's gender policies on indigenous women in Ecuador, see Radcliffe, 2015b). Despite its potential for an economy of care, the 2008 constitution and gender policies of both National Plans for Buen Vivir assume a liberal, if redistributive gender

outlook, neither of which challenges capitalist-patriarchal structures, nor the coloniality of gender.

Communitarian theories and other decolonial feminisms question progress narratives and universalised notions of wellbeing that are inscribed in the liberal rights discourses of modern democracies (Castillo, 2017, p. 35). These decolonial feminisms rethink patriarchy from Pachamama and territory from feminist autonomy (body-territory) in order to break with modernity/coloniality – crucial readings for more radical feminist interpretations of BV/sk (Cabnal, 2012; Lozano L., 2014; Paredes, 2017, 2010; Segato, 2014; Vega, 2019; Zaragocin and Varea, 2017, p. 8). Decolonial feminist analyses therefore incorporate both bodies *and* place. Those engaged in a hybridisation between BV/sk and feminism argue that if the political project of BV/sk is told and configured excluding embodied knowledge and practices, it risks reproducing the universalising logic of modernity (Zaragocin and Varea, *Ibid*). If the flesh and blood are missing, the utopia of BV/sk becomes undone (L Araujo, 2020, pers. comm., 12 July). With the exception of Radcliffe (2015b), many of the foundational texts that conceptualise BV/sk as civilisational alternative, alternative to development, or alternative to capitalism and/or neo-liberalism, are characterised by a rather timid feminist approach. That results in the articulation of a feminism that is conceived solely as a modern project using modern epistemologies, disregarding the contributions of decolonial or communitarian feminisms (Zaragocin, 2017, pp. 17–18). In response, this research took a decolonial feminist conceptualisation of BV/sk in its *substantive, grassroots use*.

Over the last decade, a steady rise in femicides (El Comercio, 2019) and seemingly orchestrated marches and campaigns to “defend families” and heterosexual norms (El Comercio, 2017) threaten to undo decades, if not centuries of feminist work. The liberal feminism enshrined in the 2008 constitution is insufficient to challenge these attacks on women. Instead, women across Ecuador and Latin America, are engaging in their own struggles that aim to protect and maintain the reproduction of life, rather than capital.

7.2.2. Re-existence within interlinking patriarchies

The theme of ‘re-existence’ has emerged from my fieldwork. It’s a term that has become a key part of the modernity/coloniality discourse’s vocabulary. Stemming from Colombian anthropologist Adolfo Albán Achinte (2009, p. 94), re-existence refers to the mechanisms created and developed by inferiorised, racialised, silenced and marginalised communities that allow them to live and confront the reality established by the hegemonic project. Re-existence requires the de-centring of established logics in order to find the keys to forms of production, alimentation, food and rituals as well as aesthetics “within the depths of these cultures – in this case, indigenous and Afro-descendants” (Ibid). For Lang et al (2019, pp. 369–381), re-existence lies precisely in the transcendence of modernity/coloniality, which is used as a shorthand for a plethora of social and economic ills, characterised by a historical, causal relation between rights, democracy, and well-being in the geopolitical North, and exploitation, appropriation and marginalisation in the South.

In Gramsci's terms, re-existence is a way to help birth the new world and accelerate the dying of the old (Gramsci and Buttigieg, 1996, p. 33). Grassroots practices, communitarian feminisms and collective decision-making processes that don't just resist the modern/colonial world system, but re-exist within and despite it. The power of re-existence lies in stepping out of the dichotomy of domination and resistance to it, of hegemony and counter-hegemony, and instead imagining and practicing other forms of being and existing that aren't dictated by the terms of the dominant modern/colonial system. The alternative proposals and practices I have observed embody such re-existences.

One of the women I spoke to had to confront interlinking patriarchies since her abusive marriage. She experienced domestic violence with her husband and afterwards lost her employment for having a child outside marriage. As I have hinted at, however, the violence she experienced has not been the end of her story. Rather than accessing (non-existent or underfunded) state services, her form of re-existence has been grounded in a spiritual relationship with Pachamama, the community she lives in, the knowledge she has of traditional medicine and the rituals she performs with that knowledge. This wasn't an automatic process, but something she had to figure out and in many ways was forced into after being forced out of formal employment. Her journey led her to leading four different organisations. She is the president of Mashi Pierre³⁵, an NGO founded in the name of a young French professional who came to Saraguro in 2007 to work with indigenous peoples on agricultural projects. He tragically lost his life in a traffic accident in 2011. His parents helped found the foundation which

³⁵ Mashi is comrade in Kichwa, and Pierre was the French "son of Saraguro".

works with children and young adults by providing academic support, leisure activities and a convivial space to come together. It also provides childcare to younger children whose mothers are working. She is furthermore the president of an agroecological association of 17 women producers. Additionally, she is part of a countywide network of community tourism to offer accommodation, arts and crafts, gastronomy etc. She's responsible for gastronomy and traditional medicine. Lastly, she coordinates a group of young single mothers, of which some of her daughters are part:

It's been my initiative to support them, to tell them, my daughters, I have found a way out. You too can find a way out. To leave this cycle of violence that you don't deserve to go through. I had to open up this space. I have women comrades who want to study. Helping them to make their arts and crafts. And I help them find a market to sell those. To open spaces, go to markets and festivals.

In terms of her role as *chasque*, she's immensely proud to have participated in rituals and events across the country. In 2013, she led the ceremony for the CONAIE's leadership change in leadership with other wisemen and women.

Together with indigenous women from across the country, she led a march into Quito during the 2010 political crisis. She told me that she isn't afraid to challenge power when necessary, upholding her radical politics that lay the path towards the *sumak kawsay* of the Saraguros. Those include defending territory and communities from predatory capitalism, free markets and extractivism, upholding memory and honouring ancestors in this struggle and the reliance on knowledge and practices that arise out of that past:

This is very important. Because you can make your voice reach where those women are, those women in power in public spaces. But sometimes they tell us what's not true. So I had the opportunity to be seated in the same seats as they are, and say, this is what we need. We want to be free of these manipulations [...] the government says we'll have a free trade agreement. Other

countries will send their improved seeds, medicine of high quality. But we can't afford that medicine! Those seeds they bring from other countries – we have our own seeds. They want us to lose our own seeds. [...] We are losing the seeds that our elders left us. They want to uproot us, but like our Mother Dolores Cacuango said, our brave mother woman fighter, she said that we're like the grass that grows in the *páramo*. Even if they uproot us, they can't pull out our roots. So we're still here. We're here to say: We are alive! We feel the pain as human beings, just like Mother Earth, who is suffering from contamination. Once again, the mining, the big petrol companies, those transnationals that continue to exploit places like the Amazon, Zamora, the coast, in Cuenca as well. All of these areas have contaminated water. We're still fighting it.

The aspects of the struggle around which her life is centred mean that she is in a period of her life in which she is in harmony with herself, her community and nature – she is in fact putting the utopia of *sumak kawsay* into practice. The pain, sacrifices and daily efforts put in practice the Kichwa principles of not being lazy, not lying and not stealing. More importantly, from this chapter's theoretical discussion it follows that here is someone that was able to translate this dream into reality – tenuous and fragile, but real. Incidentally, those aspects – the Earth as mother and territory and interaction with it, community work and service, and rituals and ceremonies as expressions of the common good (*don comunal*) are those that indigenous intellectuals have reclaimed as the principles of *BV/sk* and life in community, and that are therefore central to an anti-capitalist and decolonial feminism (Castillo, 2017, pp. 36–41). The social and economic organisation of women agroecological producers' cooperative Sumak Mikuna in El Tambo that was presented previously follows similar patterns of re-existence.

7.3. Cosmological limits to growth: The Political Ontology of Sumak Kawsay

7.3.1. Buen Vivir/ Sumak Kawsay and the 'Ontological Turn'

Political ontology is a field that has recently emerged from the intersection of indigenous studies, posthumanism, political ecology and science and technology

studies (Blaser, 2013). It corresponds to what in anthropology has been described as the “Ontological Turn”. Its implications, however, reverberate beyond the field of anthropology. Political ontology recognises that the struggle for life and land, mainly carried out by, but not limited to, indigenous communities, is also a struggle over the nature of reality. That is, when “being” and “reality” are understood as transformative processes that are generated in concrete practices and that are situated in a concrete relational field and if ontology is used as a heuristic device (Blaser, 2013; Burman, 2017a, pp. 163–164). In short, “political ontology is concerned with telling stories that open up a space for, and enact, the pluriverse” (Blaser, 2013). Ontological conflicts are argued to lie behind the successful overturn of the previous neoliberal constitutions in Ecuador and Bolivia. They are thereby framed as a challenge to the modern constitution itself: the nature/culture dichotomy that attributes agency and intentionality to humans only, representation as epistemic method, the division of labour between politics and science, the epistemic stricture of reason that judges as unreal (i.e. as “cultural belief”) all social entities or events that cannot provide evidence etc. (Blaser, 2013; de la Cadena, 2015, pp. 99, 147; Latour, 1993). Ultimately, the separation between nature and humanity, or what Shiva calls eco-apartheid³⁶ (2013) is a “cultural belief” as well, but one whose world-making practices have led to extreme environmental degradation on a global scale. In that sense, it’s a ‘reality’ for almost every human being on this planet, whether they ascribe to that particular belief or not. Nature-as-resource is ‘out there’ as much as supernatural or earth-beings. Speaking of plural ontologies means recognising those “*mundos*

³⁶ For Shiva, the nature/culture dichotomy – eco-apartheid – is “based on the *illusion* of separateness of humans from nature in our minds and lives” (2013, my emphasis).

otros” (other worlds; Escobar, 2003) that have been subalternised for the last 500 years, but that recently have gained – ultimately tenuous – social and political traction.

Buen Vivir as grassroots practice can be described as an act of “ontological disobedience” (Burman, 2017a, p. 168) to the political and economic forces that consider nature as a resource (and that mandate oil, gas and mineral mining concessions in exchange for foreign currency). Yet, BV/sk itself is situated within an abundance of disagreements on the nature of “being” and “reality”, even if most academic analysis is devoted to BV/sk as a cultural representation, thereby restricting itself to epistemological questions (González and Vázquez, 2015).

Similarly, this chapter has shown that *sumak kawsay* in Ecuador has been rooted in the education movement, as well as struggles for land and territory by the indigenous movement. As such, *sumak kawsay* lies in the recuperation of ancestral farming practices and seeds, in the rituals and traditions and clothing of the different nationalities, and in the resistance to capitalism and development themselves.

Accordingly, in the popular left-wing interpretation of BV, it is framed as a fight to protect nature and people from the catastrophic impacts of large-scale extractive projects with a view to implementing socioeconomic and ecological alternatives to capitalist *or* socialist development (de la Cadena, 2015, p. 284). That understanding of BV deviates significantly from the “Bolivarian technocracy’s”, or “techno-populist” interpretation, capture and appropriation of the concept, e.g. expressed in Correa’s ‘human development’ (Medina, 2017, p. 88; Correa’s vision

corresponds to a use of BV as propaganda tool, see Gudynas, 2013; de la Torre, 2013). For Correa's Bolivarian technocracy, BV is an alternative development path based on redistribution of wealth derived from extractive activities, rather than an alternative to extraction- and growth-based development (Burman, 2017a, p. 158; Caria and Domínguez, 2016; Gudynas, 2013). Both the statist, as well as, to certain extents, the left-wing popular interpretations of BV, however, disagree on an ontological level with another interpretation of BV/sk. That is, to coexist (*convivir*) is a struggle for the recognition of different worlds and their subsequent peaceful and respectful coexistence as a "cosmo-life" (*cosmo-vivir*), expressed by Aymara intellectual Simon Yámpara (Yampara, 2011; de la Cadena, 2015, p. 285). This ontological dimension of the conflict is a wider manifestation of what Burman (2017a, pp. 160–165) calls the "coloniality of reality" – the ontological dimension of global coloniality.

This ontological dimension of the conflict around BV/sk disputes not just the political semantics, or meaning of BV/sk, but also the very nature of reality in which the good life takes place (Burman, 2017a, p. 160; González and Vázquez, 2015). Notwithstanding Hornborg's (2015) critique, Burman (2017a, p. 161) insists that rather than obfuscating the power analysis of global capitalism, the notion of political ontology aims to contemplate ontological differences without losing sight of the social and political struggles or asymmetrical power relations. These take place in the context of an all-encompassing modernity (Blaser, 2013), a one-world worldview that has conquered, literally and figuratively, all others (Escobar, 2012; Law, 2011). As such, ontological/epistemological struggles, that is, contestations of knowledge, being and reality, lie at the heart of material-political conflicts and

struggles against racism, sexism, ecocide etc. (Burman, 2017a, p. 162). Mirian Cisneros, who at the time of the fieldwork was president of the Sarayaku nation, drives home this point:

We, the people of Sarayaku, live in two realities. The Western one, and the traditional. The community, the traditional, is our form of life. The system has obliged us to know the reality of the Western world. For example, in speaking, Spanish, Castilian, the way we speak, this isn't our own language. We have the Kichwa language. This obliges us to communicate. To make them listen to us, because it's the only way to express ourselves. (Cisneros, 2020).

Consequently, the success or otherwise of the ontological dimension in the fight for BV/sk is dependent on the success of the left-wing popular vision and vice versa. Burman (2017a, p. 163) contends that the modernity/coloniality and BV/sk discourses lack a rigorous debate of “what there is” and the mechanisms by which one dominant reality imposes itself on others (what he calls a “colonial ontological war”). To Maldonado-Torres' (2007) question of “whose knowledges count”, Burman adds “Whose realities count? Whose reality is allowed to be real?”. Lechón's (2017) analysis has, however, shown a very early engagement with *allikawsay* as a process of *yachay tinkuy* (encounter, confrontation and convergence of knowledges) that disputes whose realities count from the early 20th century onwards.

To illustrate this point, let's consider the situation of the Tagaeri and Taromenane, two nomadic indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation in the rainforests of the Yasuni National Park. The Tagaeri, Taromenane and Waorani are threatened by oil drilling and the subsequent pollution and toxification of the rainforest's water, soil and air (Recinos, 2018a). Arguably, their reality is denied in favour of those who consider the rainforest not their universe and home, but a “natural resource”.

That isn't to say that this ontological conflict contests what is real, but rather that the ontological dimension of global coloniality is a conflict between different realities that exist in a pluriverse (Burman 2017, p.163). In that sense, the rainforest can both be a cosmos and a resource for copper, crude oil, or gold. Whose reality becomes privileged in the context of a global political economy, however, is what is contested in the ontological dimension of the conflict between extractivism and BV/sk (Sullivan, 2017). Furthermore, "putting modes of existence at the center privileges the role of qualitative subjects", rather than falling into the mode of representational thinking that led to

to classification and criticism, and to a colonial and dogmatic image of thought – a place from which it is difficult to think about and make room for otherness and its expression (González and Vázquez, 2015).

Contrary to culture, however, the every-day practices that are constitutive of an ontology, such as coca-leaf ceremonies (*k'intu*) or ritual offerings to earth-beings (*despachos*), don't necessarily make the underlying ontology visible (Strathern, 2019). Ontological disagreements therefore may not always be at the forefront of the social or ecological issues they are part of or give rise to.³⁷ Strathern (2019) instead speaks of 'ontological divergence' based on the multiplicity of different ontologies, rather than similarity or dissimilarity between them. Therefore, ontology as mode of inquiry should *not* be imputed to what is under study (Ibid).³⁸

³⁷ Cf. de la Cadena's (2015, pp. 273–275) recounting of the struggles against mountain top removal mining concessions in the Ausangate and Sinkara mountains in 2006. For the Quechua people there, these earth-beings who would resist destruction and destroy the people around them instead. The concessions were halted, but not through demanding respect for *tirakuna* (earth-beings), but by requesting environmental protection (Ibid, p. 275). Modern politics turned the radical difference of *tirakuna* into cultural belief, incompatible with the facts of science, the economy and nature (Ibid). This arguably exemplifies the "coloniality of reality" that the people in Ocongate, Peru live under.

³⁸ Strathern thus speaks of ontologies as *gathered fields*, since they emerge under "specific, situated social circumstances across numerous spaces of social activity" (Strathern, 2019 paraphrasing Kapferer's response to Descola (2014)).

As such, the BV/sk struggles' protagonists are partially connected to each other, the state and the cosmology of BV/sk to varying degrees (Strathern, 2004 in de la Cadena, 2015, p. 32). Lechón's paper (2017) illustrates this point when he shows that during the 1930s and '40s, the recuperation of *alli causag carca* (he who lived well in the past) was gained by educating peasant, indigenous, montubio children in Western-style schools. In other words, the connection between a good life and knowledge was made in colonial terms.

In contrast, the Intercultural Pluriversity Amawtay Wasi founded in 2004 specifically centred indigenous knowledges in order to achieve Good Living through relationality and interculturality. Similarly, the diffusion of *sumak kawsay* in the 21st century from the Amazon Kichwa peoples towards the Andes partially connected their world-making practices. The Amazon cosmologies aren't based on Pachamama, since this particular deity doesn't exist in Amazonian ontologies. It is, however, an easily understood concept for indigenous peoples from the Amazon, in particular after it became a central referent point within the BV/sk discourse in the 1990s. Lastly, the governance plan of Alianza País 2007-2011 took Buen Vivir as the basis for their party-political programme, understood as living "in harmony with nature" – rather than an ontological disagreement or divergence, this was an instance of ontological convergence. Until, of course, the Correa government started to weaponize and co-opt the concept and initiate, or rather, continue the colonial ontological war against those communities who resisted its neo-extractivist policies.

Analytically, these partial connections mean that the protagonists escape a neat separation into indigenous, non-indigenous and mestizaje. When both civil society groups such as *Yasunidos* (2019) as well as indigenous women defenders of the rainforest (Recinos, 2018a) fight against extraction in the Ecuadorian Amazon together, they foster what Jardine (2019) calls “the principle of responsibility” in relation to research, and what Yámpara calls a “cosmo-life”. This “commitment to the pluriverse – the partially connected (Strathern 2004) unfolding of worlds” (Blaser, 2013) can be translated into “a proposal for a politics that, rather than requiring sameness, would be underpinned by divergence” (de la Cadena, 2015, pp. 285–286). Again, the Amazon would be preserved so to speak both as a global sink for carbon, as well as the universe (and home) for the Tagaeri and Taromenane. Nevertheless, a reader of Latin American politics will be aware that this isn’t a new discussion.

7.3.2. World-making practices that delineate cosmological limits to (development-as-)growth

A “world where many worlds fit” – the words of the Zapatistas – necessarily requires the recognition of different political ontologies. The depth of attention paid to questions of ontology, however, in the context of anthropological research, has been more recent. BV/sk came to attention around the same time as discussions on political ontology and corresponding challenges to the nature-culture dichotomy became more prominent in the humanities and social sciences (OT) (Blaser, 2013; Burman, 2017b; Castro, 1998; Descola, 2013). Yet, questions regarding the political ontology of BV remain, particularly in the Ecuadorian context. In Bolivia, the political ontology of Living Well may serve to

explain the difference between the government conception of BV and that of *sumaq qamaña*. The latter is rooted in an Aymara indigenous, katarist vision that demands the reconstitution of the *ayllus* and considers the agency and intentionality of non-humans as constitutive of reality (Burman, 2017a, p. 164). Yet, there hasn't been an inquiry into the political ontology of *sumak kawsay* in the Ecuadorian context. Especially in the Andean region, questions remain regarding the ethnographic rigour and validity of claims around personhoods and ecologies of practice as made, for example, by de la Cadena and Burman (Gose, 2018). There is also some wider scepticism of Ontological Turn's usefulness for progressive politics (Graeber, 2015b; Hornborg, 2015). Additionally, Yampará's proposal for *convivir*, or a cosmo-life is grounded in *Aymara* cosmology and methodology. Consequently, one of the sets of research questions that this fieldwork addresses is the role of cosmologies and theories of value – what brings these 'other worlds' (Escobar, 2003) into being (Escobar, 2003; Graeber, 2013) in Ecuadorian communities. In other words, what is the relation between nature and culture and which socioeconomic or ritualistic patterns and behaviours create local ontologies?

I propose that the political ontology, or world-making practices of *sumak kawsay* lead to the recognition of "cosmological limits to growth", or in the Ecuadorian context, to "development-as-growth". These limits aren't "natural", that is, delineating hard limits of nature which clash with unlimited needs (Kallis, 2019), or internal, that is, morally constructed. Instead, the worldmaking practices of *sumak kawsay* produce limits to economic, social activities and needs, respect for which guarantees the well-being of nature, which, in turn, produces material and

spiritual wellbeing in its people. Examples of the patterns and behaviours that create these ontologies, in which Pachamama isn't a symbol, but a living being, are rituals such as conversing over fire or rubbing the hands with herbs and plants from the chasque's chakra. This little act of rubbing herbs in one's hands serves to remind the participants of their connection to and with nature, calling to attention its fruits and provenance. Another ritualistic behaviour is practised when drinking *chicha* or other alcoholic beverages.

Before drinking, a little of the drink is spilled onto the earth as an offering "for Pachamama". For those who are in the habit of doing so, Pachamama is thereby held in constant awareness, care, and affection. The people I have observed doing so were from rural communities that depended on agriculture, which may explain the offering from a utilitarian perspective. However, the associates of Sumak Mikuna, for example, chose to grow their food without agrochemicals when the majority of their fellow community members weren't aware of agroecology as a type of production. Their produce is smaller and more expensive than their competitors', which makes it hard to sell. In the beginning, they were even prohibited from selling their produce at the local markets.³⁹ Yet, for the associates, variety and quality are connected to their own personal health and that of their children, as well as that of the top soils. BV/sk, therefore, "is not to destroy nature, which in turn won't destroy us" (Velasque, 2020). The political ontology of sumak kawsay is consequently founded on reciprocity.

³⁹ Their boycott at a local market when selling their first organic strawberries prompted the members to set up the association in the first place.

Caring and mutually supportive relationships within families and communities, identified by Churuchumbi (2014) as prerequisites for Good Living in Cayambe, bear direct influence on relationships with Pachamama:

My children have grown up without their mother [because of work]. Therefore, my children won't have the same affection for other people and Mother Earth. Because if you don't care about other people, you also won't care and throw your litter on the floor. (Velasque, 2020).

Nature isn't constructed apart from humans. To the contrary, trees, mountains and the rain are gods, sacred places and earth-beings who give energy to and release stress from those who visit them (Chancosa, 2020; Velasque, 2020). Naturally, these places will be protected (Chancosa, 2020). Assigning agency to rocks, considered inert, or abiotic, material by the natural science, casts them as part of the "living world", a different cosmology to the 'modern Constitution' (Latour, 1993, pp. 13–15; see Chapter Five) which facilitates their incorporation as mineral resources into the global market economy. In Chapter Five, I suggested that an ontological paradigm shift from materials to the "living world" would begin to dismantle the semantics and power of domination that underlie the construction of nature as apart from humans.

Many of the physical limits to growth have already been exceeded with no discernible impact on extraction-based modes of living in over-developed countries (Brand and Wissen, 2014). Furthermore, social and secular limits to growth have resulted in rising inequalities within advanced economies (Jackson, 2019). In turn, the exploration of relational limits to growth has a long tradition in anthropology (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1976). Recently, it has begun entering more mainstream sustainability discussions, for example in urban contexts (Lucero and

Gonzalez Cruz, 2020). With regards to degrowth, attention to the cultural production of nature and the role of a binary construction of nature and culture in perpetuating the economic growth paradigm highlights the need for alternatives to social, physical and secular limits to growth. Relational, or cosmological, limits to growth converge with epistemologies and ontologies that postulate cosmology as normative restraint to environmental exploitation. This chapter suggests cosmological limits to growth as an onto-epistemological and normative restraint to economic growth and associated destruction of nature.

The cosmologies made visible by these world-making practices, which I argue delineate cosmological limits to growth, aren't necessarily pushing against the type of linear worldview and concept of nature-as-resource that feed over-consumption and unfettered growth in affluent communities of the Global North. Inscribing limits to linear development into these relational practices may seem out of place. However, given these communities' partial connection to modernity, there are open calls for curbing socially and ecologically harmful changes that could be summed up under "development-as-growth". In these communities, I observed resistance to the expansion of agricultural production with chemical fertilisers and/or export-oriented flower monocultures, as well as to the construction of luxury housing developments by returning migrants from Spain or the US. As such, it is appropriate to speak of cosmological *limits* to growth, as these don't take place in a "pure" or "traditional" cultural context but in the hybrid spaces characteristic of modernity/coloniality.

7.3.3. Cosmological Limits to Growth as Alternative to Development

In the preceding chapter, subsection '5.3.3. Rights of Nature' discussed the processes of *mestizaje* that have produced the legal framework and practice of RoN in Ecuador. It also presented some of the challenges and tensions that arise when RoN are presented as a decolonial project. Namely, the entrenchment of liberal legal paradigms that rely on the very notions of separation, property and hierarchy that the RoN discourse ostensibly aims to challenge. The positioning of non-human nature as a legal good can hegemonise and entrench its separation from human nature. Despite the indigenous origins of the Ecuadorian RoN framework, its institutionalisation can be considered to have foreclosed the entrance of plural, non-mechanistic ways of relating to nature into legal and political public discourse. Furthermore, despite several favourable court rulings, the constitutional mandate of RoN continues to be dispensed with in favour of conventional, extraction-based development-as-growth. The legal basis for these contradictions can be found in several Articles of the Montecristi constitution itself (2008, Arts. 1, 261 par. 7, 317, 408), which, in line with previous constitutions, grant the state inalienable, indispensable rights and exclusive power over renewable and non-renewable resources, including amongst others bio- and genetic diversity. The strategy to de-commodify nature by extending legal personhood to it (Acosta, 2020, 2011, p. 339) has been built on an ambiguous constitutional base from the start, malleable to government interest.

Additionally, RoN as an expression of the twin constitutional mandates of plurinationality and interculturality continue to be caught in ontological conflicts. For some academics I spoke to during my fieldwork, the 1997 constitution's right

to a healthy environment was more useful in delineating environmental protection than what they considered to be a potentially vacuous right to Good Living in harmonious relations with 'nature'. For the indigenous participants of my study, however, the (more mechanistic) concept of "environment" was equally hollow and could mean anything or nothing. RoN, in turn, were considered to be much more concrete and also relating to human rights. RoN thereby successfully contest the 'coloniality of reality' (Burman, 2017a, pp. 160–165) experienced by these participants. Subsequently, when centring indigenous respondents' views on RoN, there is a clear sense of pride in having achieved the inclusion of RoN, and by extension, political demands of the indigenous movement in the national constitution:

But where does the idea for Rights of Nature come from? It originates from the [indigenous] *pueblos* and nationalities! We have been talking about this in Kichwa terms since the first agrarian reform in Ecuador in 1962 and '64. Of course, we didn't call it Rights of Nature. We called it respect for Pachamama. Respect for land and territory. Our agenda as *pueblos* and nationalities has always been land and territory, hasn't it? Land, justice and freedom. [...] Since '42 the revolts have been for land, justice and freedom. Obviously, we didn't call that Rights of Nature. We said look, stop dividing the land. The land is communal. Allow us to produce on communal terms. Allow us to be the owners of the land and not just one owner per 1,500, 5,000, 10,000 or 20,000 hectares. We didn't call this Rights of Nature, no. We said, respect our lands and our territories. That's where the Rights of Nature topic came from, in its Spanish expression (Velasque, 2020).

Over the last 50 years, struggles for land and territory have often evolved around resistance to extractivism. Yet, since the Montecristi constitution came into effect, the most high-profile successful struggle against oil and gas drilling hasn't drawn on the constitutional RoN mandate but broader Human Rights violations against the Sarayaku *pueblo*. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled against the state of Ecuador for violating the Sarayaku *pueblo's* right to previous and fair

consultation, as well as their exercise of communal property and cultural rights after unilaterally granting oil exploration and exploitation concessions to CGC, a private Argentine company (IACHR, 2012). It would be interesting, if impossible to evaluate whether the plaintiffs would have drawn on RoN violations in their complaint, had these been available to them at the time of the process.

In 2019, the Kichwas of Santa Clara, located in the Ecuadorian Amazon province of Pastaza, won a case in the second instance against a proposed major hydroelectric project in the river Piatúa (Cardona, 2019). Alleged to have foregone the mandatory free, prior and informed consultation with the Kichwa *pueblo* of Santa Clara, Ecuadorian electrical power company Genefran S.A. was poised to divert 90% of the Piatúa river into nearby river Jandiayacu. This type of major encroachment into what is both indigenous territory and a biodiversity hotspot would have likely put further strain on a vulnerable area facing multiple threats from climate change and extractivism. From March to May 2020, historic floods, storm surges and landslides destroyed schools, bridges, homes, cultivated fields, and communal buildings in Sarayaku and the rest of Pastaza. In April 2020, the neighbouring Amazonian provinces of Sucumbíos, Napo and Orellana were affected by a crude oil spill from a burst pipeline that contaminated the Coca and Napo rivers. The spill affected approximately 120,000 people who depend on the rivers for physical and cultural survival, and already faced multiple health threats from the Covid-19 pandemic and dengue epidemic respectively (Romero G., 2020). For some, there are therefore hopes that the successful case against the Piatúa hydroelectric project opens a precedent for major companies to take indigenous communities' right to free, informed and prior consultation seriously,

and eventually, the case for RoN as well (Félix, 2020). If that were the case, the RoN discourse could deliver a route into a post-economy (Acosta, 2020), centred on human wellbeing and ecological equilibria.

Despite its perpetuation of categorical binaries (nature vs. society) and problematic colonial categories, RoN nevertheless present a unique intervention in academic and public debates about the destruction of the natural world. RoN present ways to challenge those processes. As a legal instrument, they're easily co-opted and overridden. Nevertheless, I interpret them as a non-reformist reform (see 3.5. 'Non-reformist reforms' – a preliminary conclusion'). RoN may only represent a *reform* to the legal system (as opposed to its re-construction with different, that is, decolonial, categories and analytical frameworks). This reform, however, opens up possibilities for ontological and epistemological pluralisms. Relational ontologies can be protected using the RoN framework, and even imputed into it. As such, it cannot be absorbed or made dysfunctional by a liberal legal rights system that is built on private property rights. The legal and physical fight against the paramilitaries recruited by CGC who forced their entry into Sarayaku territory at the beginning of the century won the Sarayaku *pueblo* a tenuous victory at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2012 – but the explosives buried by the paramilitary are still beneath their territory. This experience forced the *pueblo's* hand in presenting an alternative to development-as-growth and extraction. The subsequent paragraphs briefly discuss the Sarayaku's proposal – *kawsak sacha*.

The Living Forest: Kawsak Sacha

The Paris Agreement, outcome of the 21st session of the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (COP21) in 2015, represents the tactically efficacious convergence of the discursive power of neoliberalism with technocratic knowledge production in the mainstream climate movement. Coalescing the arguments made in chapters One, Two, and Five, technocratic knowledge production has created a global, governable non-human nature that is both external to humans and in need of effective management by experts and scientists. Within indigenous territories, the loci of enunciation of this climate eco-governmentality, expressed in REDD+, Payments for Ecosystem Services, carbon markets etc., are industrialised countries that have globalised their standards of (mechanistic) knowledge production as scientific (Ulloa, 2012, p. 18). These geopolitics of knowledge entrench epistemic coloniality. This is expressed in the institutionalisation of the assumption that scientific knowledge alone can solve climate change while other knowledges and identities are simultaneously localised as indigenous and/or deterritorialised through neoliberal climate change mitigation and adaptation mechanisms (Ibid). Across the South American Andean-Amazon region, some instances of this institutionalisation are the ubiquitous Life Plans (*Planes de Vida*) by indigenous groups, which aim to clarify their relationship with the state.

Life Plans are consensus-based, participatory planning instruments that stipulate governance goals for a given time periods with respect to resource management and political relations (Territorio Indígena y Gobernanza, 2020). OPIP's 1992 *Amazanga Plan de Vida* laid the foundations for the (re-)popularisation of *sumak kawsay* (see Table 6.2). While the process of laying out such a plan may have the

potential to strengthen the formation of indigenous communities as political actors who were previously not configured as such (Espinosa, 2014), the plans themselves subordinate indigenous life-worlds to the logic of development. The development logic demands effective resource management and the creation of income-based livelihoods, which I argue results in the commodification of these life-worlds. The *Territorial management plan for the Sapara Communities of the Upper Conambo River*, adjacent to Sarayaku, for example

[...] lists a series of social, economic, and conservation objectives alongside activities and funding mechanisms meant to achieve these goals. The management plan also serves to synthesize and adapt traditional processes of political organization, resource management, and economic production to interact effectively with external actors (Cummins and Sydney, n.d., p. 1)

Runa Foundation⁴⁰, a US-based NGO, supported the Sapara nation in the creation of a community-based ecotourism enterprise, the Naku health and wellness centre. Apart from Naku, which arguably commodifies the ancestral medicinal knowledge of the Sapara, the “sustainable funding mechanisms” suggested by the management report include granting forest naming rights and adoptions to (wealthy) individuals and various REDD+ mechanisms (Ibid, p. 82). The report is exemplary of the geopolitics and coloniality of knowledge, which seeks to commodify and managerialise not just climate change adaptation and mitigation, but indigenous knowledge and territory. The Life Plans themselves introduce an economic rationality – not to a “pure” or noble savage, but to communities whose only option in the defence against extractivism is to do introduce or adopt economic rationality.

⁴⁰ Now merged with another organisation (Plan Junto) to form a new one – Los Aliados. According to their website (n.d.), the organisation aims “to fundamentally transform business in the Andes and the Amazon.”

The inter-epistemic dialogues which this thesis takes as a pre-condition to addressing the civilisational crisis have so far been precluded by the discursive formation of climate change (Lang, 2020). This is moreover exemplified by the (lack of) participation of indigenous peoples at UNFCCC conferences. Indigenous peoples' participation is usually confined to few selected delegates of the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) who join negotiations, as well as a single, one minute and twenty seconds High Level Segment Statement (e.g. UNFCCC, 2020a, 2020b).⁴¹ During COP21, a confluence of side events led by civil society actors tried to garner support for environmental and indigenous rights. GARN held its Third International RoN Tribunal. Delegates of the Sarayaku *pueblo* in turn introduced their proposal of a 'Living Forest'. The proposal of *kawsak sacha* tries to counter the exclusion of territorially contingent, indigenised knowledge from the discursive field of climate change. To the detriment of inter-epistemic dialogues and the provincialisation of climate change science, indigenous rights were dropped from the final operative part of the Paris Agreement. Owing to its subversive power, the Sarayaku's proposal will be briefly introduced here.

Having had the opportunity to speak with the president of the Sarayaku *pueblo*, Mirian Cisneros in March 2020, I was able to interrogate the concept beyond a hermeneutical reading of the declaration itself. Following decades of environmental conflict that pivoted state-sanctioned extractivism against the territorial autonomy of the Sarayaku *pueblo*, the Sarayaku's hand was forced to

⁴¹ At COP23 in Bonn 2017, Patricia Gualinga, international spokesperson for the Sarayaku *pueblo*, was given that slot on behalf of environmental NGOs.

defend themselves on a legal, scientific and international plane.⁴² The proposal of *kawsak sacha* is a work of translation, an inter-epistemic dialogue that takes place within an unequal power balance. The Sarayaku, though living in a territory that is reachable only by boat or airplane, are very apt at navigating the two worlds they inhabit. International exposure gained from the Sarayaku vs. Ecuador case at the IACHR and participation at UNFCCC events, as well as political encounters and organising networks of indigenous peoples across Latin America have enabled the Sarayakus to secure the funding to draft and publicise the Living Forest proposal. It took five years to produce in collaboration with anthropologists, linguists, development experts (“*técnicos*”) and even tourists to help translate and systematise the memory and knowledge of their ancestors and shamans into a language understood by the audience the proposal is aimed at (government officials, civil servants, NGOs, etc.).

The proposal sets out a new legal category for the protection of the rainforest and territory of the Sarayaku, demanding international and national recognition for the Living Forest as *Sacred Territory and Biological and Cultural Patrimony of the Kichwa People in Ecuador*. This new category is an attempt to use the available legal, political and epistemic tools of the modern/colonial nation state to the advantage of the Sarayakus. Similar to RoN, it can be understood as a non-reformist reform. In capitalising on an astute strategy of pushing the notion of legal category to include spiritual beings, the Sarayaku have pioneered a reform (of the legal category of Protected Area) that cannot be subsumed by the

⁴² The 135,000ha of Sarayaku territory form part of a larger, undivided parcel of land in the Pastaza province that was awarded to its communities in 1992 by the Ecuadorian state (IACHR, 2012, p. 18). In 1996, the state granted a crude oil exploitation agreement in that area.

modern/colonial system while expanding their potential to secure, defend and progress their self-governance structures (Bond, 2008, and Wright, 2013, p. 20 in Petridis, 2016). The proposal is incompatible with the mechanistic view of nature as controllable and exclusive resource for humans. It represents non-Anthropocentric ways of relating to the Forest.

The Living Forest is therefore based on a political ontology which considers the forest a living and *social* being “made up entirely of living selves and the communicative relations they have with each other” (Pueblo Originario Kichwa de Sarayaku, 2015, p. 1). This resonates with the previous’ chapters arguments that used insights from natural science to ascribe anthropomorphic characteristics, and most importantly, agency and rights to the living world. The Living Forest, however, is embedded within the cosmology of the Sarayaku. It “*emerges as an authentic way of guaranteeing the Rights of Nature in those spaces that have not yet been decimated*” (Ibid, p. 2, emphasis in original). The objective in protecting the Living Forest from oil, gas, timber etc. extraction is to achieve *sumak kawsay*

[...] by means of the application and execution of *Life Plans* that are sustained by the three foundational pillars of the *Sumak Kawsay Plan*: Fertile Land (*Sumak Allpa*); Living in Community (*Runaguna Kawsay*); and Forest Wisdom (*Sacha Runa Yachay*) (Ibid).

As discussed above, these Life Plans are often caught in a developmentalist logic. *Kawsak Sacha*; however, attempts to centre these on food sovereignty guaranteed by “a healthy territory free of contamination as well as abundant productive land”. As such, *Kawsak Sacha* is also considered a “viable economic model”.

In adopting the language of economics, the Sarayaku aim to propose a definite alternative to the extractivist economy that has threatened their livelihood since

the early 2000s. However, it also poses a challenge to the nature/culture divide underlying the developmentalist logic. *Kawsak Sacha* “emphasizes that in order to extend rights to nature, one must first recognize its entities as persons (and not mere objects)” who relate to each other and “to the Indigenous People that share their land”. This relation between non-human beings and between non-human and human beings is crucial for overcoming a materialist, mechanistic cosmology that ultimately sanctions environmental exploitation. The Sarayaku’s ancestors had a connection with Nature through their dreams using Ayahuasca and/or other living beings (plants) (Cisneros, 2020). All non-human nature that encompasses the plant, fungi and animal kingdoms is considered to have life, some of which is inhabited by spiritual beings in certain sacred places such as mountains. These are women and men who are pure, in contrast to the human inhabitants surrounding these areas. Both non-human nature and those spiritual beings are considered social and political actors within the Living Forest proposal. The challenge, however, is how to consult them, or make their voice heard when for example sacred places are considered for resource exploitation (Ibid). The Sarayakus, through their relationship with these spiritual beings, consider their role as defenders of these places and beings. With the proposal of *Kawsak Sacha*, now widely adopted by the *pueblos* within the Pastaza province, the Sarayaku have achieved national and international attention to their political ontology and the ontological conflicts that the proposal arose from:

To submit a proposal, to make them listen to us, because it is the only way to express ourselves.

This is what we’ve achieved. Because before, our ancestors only had a connection within their territory. And it was difficult. Today, we have to manage technology at the same level [as *mestizos* and Westerners], we have to have the same knowledges. But for them, it is difficult to live in our

reality. There we are clear where we want to arrive. We want them to respect our decisions
(Cisneros, 2020).

As such, the Living Forest creates an inter-epistemic dialogue, a partial connection in an uneven playing field. The Kichwa ontology that underlies it proposes cosmological limits to growth by considering nature not as resource, but as living being. It presupposes agency in the living world that is non-human nature and resonates with arguments made in Chapter Five. The legal category of Living Forest doesn't necessarily need to be officially recognised by the Ecuadorian state to be considered and taken seriously by degrowth, for example. Speaking from below, *Kawsak Sacha*, is a legal category of protection that considers the living world to be connected beyond the human. This type of RoN discourse pushes beyond the notion of appreciating a "nature out there" to be protected from society. In opening up to such proposals, degrowth could move towards integrating ontological, affective and climate justice in its policy and practice.

Sacred Watersheds: Cuencas Sagradas

Cuencas Sagradas (Sacred Watersheds) is a transnational governance initiative conducted by various indigenous organisations of the Peruvian (AIDSESP) and Ecuadorian (CONFENIAE) Amazon in collaboration with Pachamama Alliance, Fundación Pachamama (FP) and Amazon Watch. In Ecuador, it is led by the Shuar and Achuar peoples. Both nationalities have strong mechanisms to protect their cultural identities. The initiative aims to advance a post-carbon governance and bioregional administration led by the indigenous peoples of the Amazonian watersheds of the Napo, Pastaza and Marañón rivers. According to FP (2019), a two-year consultation period within the area of the *Cuencas Sagradas* has resulted

in: a strong regional stakeholder alliance between indigenous peoples, governments and civil society, based on a shared vision for its protection; an economic and ecological plan as well as a long-term financing plan accepted by the stakeholders on the basis of initial compromises; obstacles to the expansion of petrol, mineral and other extractive industries including associated infrastructures.

The goal of the initiative was to create a bioregional plan for the area covered by the Sacred Watersheds (see 'Fig. 7.1 The Cuencas Sagradas proposed area of protection') based on an ecological and economic assessment. Now referred to as 'masterplan', a classic regional planning document (The Pachamama Alliance, 2020), it will be presented to the Peruvian and Ecuadorian governments to

[...] lay out a pathway to the protection and sustainable development of the region and to a governance system based in Indigenous principles of solidarity and community well being [*sic*]
(Ibid).

According to Fundación Pachamama programme officers, the overarching principles of the plan are based on respect for indigenous rights, Rights of Nature and the 'bioeconomy', that is, economic practices that don't damage nature (Félix, 2020). The masterplan is informed by the Life Plans of the area's indigenous communities. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted progress on the *Cuencas Sagradas* masterplan, which was planned to be finalised at the end of 2020. Like the Kawsak Sacha proposal, and indeed *sumak kawsay* itself, the initiative's origins lie at the interface of development and indigenous organisations (Novo, 2018). As the following pages will go on to analyse, however, its aims and consequences differ substantially from both.



Fig. 7.1 The Cuencas Sagradas proposed area of protection (map reproduced from Fundación Pachamama website, 2020) White lines indicate headwaters. Yellow lines delineate the area of their watersheds (see Koenig, 2019, p. 13). The map also shows the courses of the rivers Napo and Marañón. Iquitos is the capital city of Peru's Maynas province. Accessible only by boat or air travel, it is located at the borders with Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil.

Figure 7.1 shows the geographical distribution of these watersheds and their headwaters. The area encompassing the *Cuencas Sagradas* is considered to be the planet's most biodiverse terrestrial ecosystem. Covering an area of 30 million hectares in Peru and Ecuador, the watershed territory belongs to nearly 500,000 indigenous people of twenty nationalities, including communities living in voluntary isolation (Koenig, 2019, p. 5). The Tagaeri and Taromenane are amongst them. According to an infographic published on the initiative's website, the area furthermore holds one third of all the planet's species (Cuencas Sagradas, n.d., p. 2). In Ecuador, the proposal specifically calls for the government to uphold its

constitutional RoN mandate. So far, however, the *Cuencas Sagradas* initiative seems to comprise a few online reports, a donation option and a signature collection in its support. Moreover, *Cuencas Sagradas* may be used as a way to intervene in the territories that are so far “undeveloped”. The following paragraphs elaborate on this thought.

Similar to *Kawsak Sacha*, it responds to complaints made by successive governments that indigenous peoples only oppose development(-as-growth) and extractivist projects in particular – a form of dog whistle that often panders to the trope of “the indigenous” as obstacle to modern development. Like *Kawsak Sacha*, it isn’t represented as a project, but a vision of indigenous life that is grounded in a regenerative economy and ecological justice. *Cuencas Sagradas* is a response, amongst others, to the unprecedented Amazon wildfires of 2019 that swept into Ecuador and Peru from Brazil and Bolivia, and petrol and mineral mining threats to indigenous territories and Amazon watersheds. The initiative calls on the respective national governments to declare the region a place of global interest and to halt all environmental resource extraction, including oil explorations in the area’s 27 petrol blocks (Koenig, 2019, pp. 5–6). The initiative also calls for government support for indigenous communities to develop their Life Plans (in collaboration with Fundación Pachamama, as discussed above). These would be centred on a regenerative economy based on solar power and community enterprises. The Kara Solar foundation is an example of both: “a solar-powered river transportation, energy, and community enterprise initiative in the Ecuadorian Amazon” (n.d.) and territory of the Achuar.

For the remotely located Achuar communities, Kara Solar represents a way out of oil dependence for transport. On the other hand, Fundación Pachamama with support of USAID has delivered funding and training for the construction and management of the Kapawi eco-lodge, situated within the 800,00-hectare Achuar territory in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Operated by the Achuar themselves and accessible only by plane, revenues reportedly support “the community, preserving their culture and protecting the Amazon rainforest” (Kapawi, 2020a). In order to be able to manage the lodge, the Achuar received training – by FP and others – in marketing, service industry skills, English, etc. Under the guise of eco-tourism, Achuar culture and cosmology is firstly Otherised and exoticized, secondly, treated as capital and thirdly, commodified. The Kapawi website (2020b) advertises accordingly:

In the Achuar's understanding of the community of life. They don't live in the forest. They are of the forest. During your stay you will be awakened to feel the same sense of unity with nature.

While the Achuar have strong mechanisms to protect themselves against cultural identity loss, for example by excluding anyone who no longer speaks Achuar, the introduction of economic rationalities that prioritise exchange over use value, the market logic that commodifies skills, cosmologies and nature, as well as managerial skills that ultimately aim to govern people and nature may work to transform cosmologies that have acted as normative constraint on the exploitation of nature (see Chapter Eight). The experience of the Kapawi eco-lodge may have also propelled the Achuar to work with FP on the *Cuencas Sagradas* initiative.

Yet, in contrast to the Sarayaku's *Kawsak Sacha* proposal, *Cuencas Sagradas* doesn't seem to have developed from below and in consultation with the

communities but with FP and certain (male) Achuar leaders. The community leaders have been accused of not having discussed this initiative with their base, which complicates diffusion and acceptance. Furthermore, there is a certain degree of performativity in relation to indigeneity, as seen in the profile of Domingo Peas, who claims to be the author of the *Cuencas Sagradas* initiative, on the Pachamama Alliance website (Pachamama Alliance, n.d.). Unlike *Kawsak Sacha*, *Cuencas Sagradas* doesn't attempt to base the legal protection of these territories on the Achuar's, Shuar's etc. cosmologies. Instead, its demands are centred on the region's global importance as a carbon sink and biodiversity hotspot, which follows the dominant discursive formation of climate change.

A report on these Sacred Watersheds, published by Amazon Watch, points to the role of international finance capital circulated by amongst others Blackrock and Goldman Sachs, the importance of China and its debt instruments in the Ecuadorian petrol sector, as well as the Californian crude oil market vis-à-vis accelerated crude oil exploration in these watersheds (Koenig, 2019, pp. 32–34).

This political economy analysis is complemented, however, by calls made by indigenous leaders during the IUCN's III Latin American and Caribbean Congress of Protected Areas. They demanded to respect indigenous rights through the protection of these watersheds, which would accelerate the transition to a post-extractive, plurinational, intercultural and ecological civilisation (Ibid, p. 38).

While *Cuencas Sagradas* isn't a grassroots, bottom-up initiative, it nevertheless seems to outwardly counter conservative conservation policy that treats indigenous (collective) rights as isolated from and often opposed to environmental conservation measures such as protected areas or national parks (Paredes and

Kaulard, 2020). Yet, the connection to these NGOs also hinders the capacity of the *Cuencas Sagradas* to articulate an inter-epistemic dialogue between indigenous cosmologies and conservation measures.

The financialization and commercialisation of non-human nature is perpetuated by the discursive formation of climate change as an economic problem that displaces other forms of knowing in relation to climate. In that sense, the involvement of these NGOs in initiatives like *Cuencas Sagradas* must be seen through a critical lens that interrogates the commodification of indigenous cultures and cosmologies within a neoliberal climate change mitigation and adaptation framework. Moreover, NGOs may undermine and divide the indigenous social movement. Fundación Pachamama and Acción Ecológica, two acclaimed environmental NGOs based in Ecuador, have both been accused of doing so. One cause for grievances within the indigenous social movement of the Amazon was an event hosted during International Women's Day in Puyo, Pastazas. During the same weekend, 6th – 8th March 2020, the CONFENAIE hosted its 3rd Women's Assembly of the Ecuadorian Amazon in Puyo and Unión Base (seat of the CONFENAIE, 5km outside Puyo). The parallel event, *Mujeres Amazonicas*, alleged to have been organised by either or both of these organisations, drew women away from the CONFENAIE assembly, partially by offering money for transport there. The agitation by environmental NGOs thus undermines the CONFENAIE's position as the legitimate social movement for the indigenous peoples of the Amazon.⁴³ It thereby may decrease the CONFENAIE's negotiating power with the

⁴³ It may, however, also have been the case that the women who attended the parallel event felt more comfortable to speak and be heard there.

government, for example in resistance to the latest mining concession in Cofán territory or pushing for ILO 169 compliance.

In that sense, *Cuencas Sagradas* is an ambivalent initiative, which as of mid-2021 has not yet received much scholarly attention. Rather than an act of inter-epistemic dialogue, the *Cuencas Sagradas* perhaps can be seen either as an expression of the Shuar and Achuar's *desire to be modern*, or as a function of an all-encompassing modernity that draws into its fold those who the colonial encounter had previously left not untouched, but only partially connected to it (Blaser, 2013). Rather than pitting the idea of a "traditional" society that has developed without contact and influence of others against a "modern" one, the *Cuencas Sagradas* initiative is the product of ontological conflicts themselves.

7.4. Limits to Cosmological Limits to Growth: A Preliminary Conclusion

The rejection of mineral or petrol mining by affected communities often renders them invisible in the eyes of the state (Cisneros, 2020) – unless they offer their own alternatives to development. These alternatives to development, some of which have been discussed in this thesis (*Allianza Solidaria*, *Kawsak Sacha*, *Cuencas Sagradas*) are proposed not just by indigenous peoples but mestizo communities as well. They most commonly are produced in reaction to external threats, often in the form of crude oil and mineral extraction concessions, but also the introduction of international climate change discourse and market-based adaptation and mitigation mechanisms. The issue with these alternative proposals is that firstly, onus is put on indigenous people or mestizo communities who resist extractivism to come up with these alternatives. Secondly, often after working

together with NGOs, these solutions tend to advocate and nurture these communities' integration into regional and/or global markets. That applies to ecotourism projects, as well as the production of soaps, shampoos or agricultural products with "added value" (jams, cheese, shade-grown coffee etc.). The organic coffee grown in Intag, an area where the mestizo community has resisted extractivism for the last 25 years with varying degrees of success, is now sold globally. The growers' association has a contract with Japanese buyers until 2070. It remains to be seen whether the organic growing conditions that protect many endemic species like the famous Andean spectacled bear, will be maintained while simultaneously expanding growing areas to meet contractual obligations. It could be argued that their resistance⁴⁴ to mining has so far been successful⁴⁴ because of their engagement in the production of global exchange commodities.

The intellectual appropriation and commercialisation of ancestral knowledge and plants, what Shiva (1997) calls biopiracy, represents another example of Amazonian communities 'being rendered visible to the state' . IKIAM⁴⁵, the Ecuadorian Regional Amazon University (2020), for example, in partnership with German development agency GIZ and small producer cooperatives such as Wiñak in Napo province are in the process of patenting *guayusa* for bio-commercial development. *Guayusa* (*Ilex guayusa*) is a holly tree endemic to the Upper Amazon basin and considered a sacred plant by Amazon communities. It is used in daily, pre-dawn rituals to stimulate communication with ancestors and each other.

According to a community member in March 2020, IKIAM is alleged to have

⁴⁴ To varying degrees. In February 2020, paramilitaries had entered Intag with view to secure a mining area.

⁴⁵ Shuar for forest.

bought *guayusa* from the producers at 0.25US\$/kg, before selling it for 10US\$/kg. IKIAM's commercial partner is Yhu.Life, based in Los Angeles, California, who market the antioxidant-rich plant as 'superfood' to produce cereal and energy bars for sale in the US (Garces, n.d.). Instead of timber products, these partnerships focus on extracting biodiversity and knowledge.

Fundación Pachamama works in partnership with indigenous communities in the Southern Ecuadorian Amazon on a food sovereignty project. Food sovereignty in this case aims to be achieved through commodity production:

We're working with the bio-economy and production of non-timber products. That can be produced without cutting the forests, without resorting to monocultures. [...] We have a project of organic Amazonian [food] sovereignty. *It's a high-value commercial product that needs the forest to grow* (Félix, 2020 my emphasis).

Fundación Pachamama sponsors a finca that is used as a base for conducting Research and Development, as well as capacity-building workshops which have delivered planting stocks for local producers. Undoubtedly, finding economic alternatives to extractive monocultures and petrol and mining extractivism are among the most pressing issues for the national economy of Ecuador as a whole, and arguably, Latin America. Furthermore, economic self-reliance of these indigenous communities may strengthen their position vis-à-vis the encroachment of extractive industries. After all, these economic activities would "render them visible in the eyes of the state". Nevertheless, here I would like to engage in a more critical reading of these developments.

Reading these developments from a political economy perspective, Dominique Temple (2003, pp. 27–28, 43) labelled the process of destroying the bases of a

community economy (by introducing commercial products) in favour of an economy for individual or collective gain as *economicide*. In displacing reciprocity as the major economic relation with which communities maintain and strengthen social ties and generate material, affective and spiritual abundance (see '7.1.3. Reciprocity and solidarity in practice'), NGOs act as Trojan Horses (Temple, 1988) that impute market logics. Ultimately, these processes lead to community debilitation or even annihilation if these communities don't engage in a form of *double economy* that preserves those reciprocal relations while maintaining links with the national or international economy (Temple, 2003, p. 39). The high-value commercial products pushed for by FP have the potential to impute exchange logics coupled to individual or collective gain decoupled from the reciprocal relationships that create community cohesion. From a political ontology perspective, the problem with these alternatives to development isn't that we're lamenting the loss of some "authentic" indigenous culture in the philosophical tradition of the "noble savage". Rather, the issue becomes clear when taking a historical and anthropological perspective.

What's at work is the slow, but steady transformation of cosmologies that have thus far acted as normative constraints of (often indigenous) populations towards non-human nature. While these populations are often located in some of the most biodiverse terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems of the world, those land areas, as well as knowledge of how to live with them sustainably, is in decline (Díaz et al., 2019, p. 5; Nepstad et al., 2006; Schuster et al., 2019). In a seminar for young indigenous community leaders from the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon at the Universidad Andina de Simón Bolívar, these leaders presented projects from their

communities that were alternatives to (mainstream, infrastructure and extractivist-based) development. All projects that were presented by the Ecuadorian delegations were ecotourism projects. While participants reported varying degrees of successful management of these projects, they all required the community to be trained in marketing, IT, English language and administration skills. In short, the slow incorporation of these communities into the managerial world of salaried labour. At the same time, however, those communities that don't have strong mechanisms to exclude those who no longer spoke their language, reported high levels of cultural change and adaptation that included loss of language, lack of interest in rituals and community cohesion. In other words, and to go back to the arguments made in Chapter Five, holistic, organic worldviews are being subsumed by perhaps not a mechanistic, but certainly managerial worldview. To certain degrees this replicates the philosophical, sociological, cultural and economic developments of early modern Europe (Merchant, 2020). These accelerated the replacement of the view of nature as a female, living and nurturing cosmos with interdependent body parts by a mechanistic view towards nature as dead and matter as inert.

The rise of merchant capitalism and enclosures, the industrial and scientific revolutions and their accompanying extractive and ecologically disastrous industries coal, metal, iron ore or tin mining from the 15th century onwards facilitated a change in European cosmology that ultimately sought to subtly sanction the exploitation of nature as resource (Merchant, p. 156). The indigenous communities in the Amazon are threatened by extractivism of oil and rare earth metals as well as monocultures, but also neoliberal climate change mitigation

The remaining 26 coloured blocks are operated by 16 different private companies and consortia. The area of *Cuencas Sagradas* covers 14 blocks.

Ecuador's renewed fervour in increasing crude oil production capacity resulted in its OPEC membership withdrawal on 01 January 2020. Simultaneously, the government continues auctioning oil blocks in remotely located, but inhabited areas (Ministerio de Energía y Recursos Naturales No Renovables, 2018). This has resulted in conflict with the territories' indigenous communities. During the 2019 auction round, a lawsuit led by the Waorani against the government's failure to conduct a consultation prior to granting concessions led to a reduction in the number and size of the blocks, as well as lower than expected investment levels (Kueffner and Millard, 2019; Recinos, 2018b; Reuters, 2019). A new auctioning round is expected for the end of 2020. The state's plan to auction 16 new blocks (coloured orange in 'Fig. 7.2 Oil blocks in Ecuador 2020', cf. with area of *Cuencas Sagradas* in 'Fig. 7.1 The Cuencas Sagradas proposed area of protection') would affect up to 5 million hectare of pristine rainforest, territory of the Waorani, Andoa, Sapara, Kichwa, Achuar, Shuar and Shiwiar (Koenig, 2019, p. 23). This pattern of primitive accumulation has in Europe resulted in a significant shift in cosmology, away from normative restraint against environmental exploitation.

Therefore, when combining contemporary political developments with a *longue durée*, speculative view into the future, it can be argued that the cultural transformation away from normative, ecologically constraining cosmologies in the Amazon will have disastrous consequences for all life on planet earth. To be clear, this isn't a historicist argument – that the Amazonian peoples of Ecuador will replicate the same historical developments of Europe. Instead, I argue that the

global political economy in which they're now embedded accelerates the production of mechanisms that wage a "colonial ontological war" (Burman, 2017a, p. 163) against the Achuar, Shuar etc. Locally, predatory extractivism and its displacement of indigenous peoples from their territories, and with that, from their knowledges, will not only lead to the disappearance of these communities, but with them, an ancestral system of knowledge that intimately connects human well-being to the health of the earth, or ecosystem services in the mechanistic tradition. In this sense, the abovementioned ecotourism projects have done nothing to halt hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation in the Amazon. Indeed, these projects themselves are highly fossil fuel dependent. Both are the harbinger of much more sinister developments. The 2020 and 2021 wildfires that raged in the Arctic, North-western America, and Australia are an indicator of what the possible effects of aggregate and accelerated fossil fuel consumption may look like. In contrast to eco-tourism or direct action, coordinated resistance and lawsuits such as that of the Waorani nevertheless have helped challenge hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation to a certain extent.

The political economy, ontology, and gender relations of *sumak kawsay* stand in marked contrast with Ecuador's extraction based economic model, as well as the neoliberal climate change adaptation and mitigation measures analysed in the introduction of this thesis. As a practice, *sumak kawsay* falls outside the alternatives offered by the dominant climate change discourse – adaptation and resilience. These have the potential to be successful on a local level. However, the global discourse on climate change adaptation and resilience, with its emphasis on geo-engineering and technocratic solutions that are often environmentally and

socially harmful, especially in the Global South, serves to obfuscate power relations, rather than inspiring resistance to changes in those power relations and processes that have generated this crisis (Buxton and Hayes, 2017, p. 287). Sumak kawsay as a political project, consisting of the Community and Solidarity Economy, respect for the Rights for Nature and the reproduction of life, is the result of an inter-epistemic dialogue; a re-existence that arises from the *democratisation* of this dialogue (Lang et al., 2019, p. 371). It represents an escape from a system that is economically resilient – fossil fuel capitalism – while reconceptualising subjectivities such as the citizen away from the consumer and towards intersubjective re-existences grounded in collective social and economic organisation (Buxton and Hayes, 2017, pp. 288, 290). An inter-epistemic dialogue between sumak kawsay and degrowth therefore has the potential to challenge fossil fuel capitalism from their respective places of relevance.

Part III – Decolonising Degrowth

Chapter 8: Ecologies of Knowledges: A Decolonial Framework for the Politics of Degrowth

8.1. Research problem, aims and questions

This thesis has produced a timely dialogue between two contemporary socioecological movements and theories from the Global North and South. Both degrowth and Buen Vivir address the urgent question of how to live well within our planet's biosocial limits. The first part of the thesis resolved to elicit the *benefits and limitations of degrowth as an effective political and economic system* (Research Question 1). Chapters Two, Three, and Four analysed degrowth theory, practice, and criticism respectively. They laid the foundations for the second part, in which I challenged the field's Eurocentric focus as pre-condition for entering in fruitful dialogue with Global South transition narratives and projects. Chapter Five put the ontological assumptions behind degrowth's ecological analysis of growth into historical, that is, colonial, context, clarifying its entanglements with and reliance on modern/colonial, hierarchical categories. To illustrate these alternatives in practice, and show how degrowth could learn from decolonial praxis, I presented a qualitative case study of *Buen Vivir*. I highlighted epistemological and ontological pluralisms as possible intellectual cross-pollination between the two systemic alternatives. Overall, the second part of this thesis, a historicization of degrowth through the lens of the modernity/coloniality framework, and ecofeminist and International Relations scholarship, as well as the Buen Vivir case study contributed to the construction of *an ethical and normative, decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth* (Research Question 2). This

chapter presents this framework in detail. First, I discuss research findings and limitations. Second, I present a normative framework for the decolonial politics of degrowth. Third, I discuss practical implications and opportunities for applications. It concludes with some recommendations for future research.

8.2. A decolonial framework for the politics of degrowth

8.2.1. Findings

This thesis started with an outline of the political economy and biophysical challenges of the current socioecological crises. One of the crises' major manifestations, climate change, has been the product of historically unjust and profoundly unequal, colonial, socioeconomic relations between 'North' and 'South'. Given the historic, colonial and unjust context of these crises, Latin American scholars have classified its underlying drivers as a *civilisational crisis*. The term serves to acknowledge how racism, classism, patriarchy, anthropocentrism, as well as science and technology, intersect to produce, sustain and exacerbate this multifaceted crisis (Lander, 2019, p. 15). The civilisational crisis and the global interdependencies of its ecological consequences challenge modern political and economic categories of analysis. These have been governed by oppositions, hierarchies and binaries (the nation state, *homo economicus*, man-woman, division of labour, scientific vs. traditional knowledge, the separation of nature from culture, etc.). The social theories and practices interrogated in this thesis challenge those analytical categories, albeit to varying extents. Degrowth challenges the doctrine of economic growth, the notion of the *homo economicus* and the economic rationality that pervades all aspects of life. BV/sk challenges the

notion of development-as-growth and above all, the separation of human from non-human life.

At the heart of this thesis lay an analysis of how the production of socioeconomic processes depends on the convergence of nature *and* culture, rather than analytically separating the two. The thesis used the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMoP) as a conceptual tool with which to analyse aspects of degrowth and *Buen Vivir/ sumak kawsay* (BV/sk), specifically, degrowth's coloniality of nature, and the coloniality of gender for BV/sk in practice. The political economy and ontology of these projects represent a systemic, or perhaps even civilisational alternative to growth-based societies and growth-based development respectively. They centre the reproduction of life, rather than capital. Both have analytical and practical strengths and weaknesses which complement each other (see Table 8.1). This conclusion presents a dialogue between these two systemic alternatives.

The literature reviews of Chapters Two and Three introduced degrowth's main tenets and situated it historically and intellectually. Chapter Four presented a critical examination of degrowth, in particular those aspects that restrict its place of relevance to (non-peripheral) Europe and other industrialised countries. In doing so, the literature review that comprises Part I of this thesis has answered Research Question 1 as following: degrowth delivers an effective critique of global growth-based capitalism, the doctrine of economic growth and neoclassical economics, as well as consumerism and its effects on human wellbeing. Degrowth scholarship spells out why and how human and ecological wellbeing must be subordinated to economic processes. Its intellectual foundations (Chapter Two), as

well as its policy proposals (Chapter Three), demonstrate that an alternative to the civilisational crisis doesn't just exist and is desirable, but that it would be possible to implement, in the here and now. The literature reviews also highlighted tensions and paradoxes within degrowth. Chapter Four in turn contributes to degrowth. First, I highlight degrowth's ahistorical, Euro- and androcentric approach to politics and policy. Second, I identify areas for further research to address those challenges, and suggest degrowth scholarship focusses on provincialisation, depatriarchalisation, and democratisation.

To overcome its Eurocentric aspects, degrowth must engage with environmental justice in a meaningful way. The analysis highlighted the need for examining the implications of the staggering historical ecological and socioeconomic debts which industrialised countries will continue to have towards the countries and peoples of the 'Global South', even in a degrowth scenario. Degrowth discussions centred on the ecological analysis of growth often present themselves as a zero-sum game of freeing up ecological space for the South with degrowth in production and consumption in the North. These discussions usually contain fairly limited examinations of those historical responsibilities that would lead to demands for ecological restoration or economic reparations (Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019). The debate's failure to examine its policy impacts on gendered and racialised divisions of labour is a further point of criticism I and others have made (see for example Barca, 2017; Gilmore, 2013). Therefore, in its current, if dynamic form, the degrowth discourse reproduces *parts* of the "anthropocentric, logocentric, hierarchical, patriarchal, racialized, heteronormative imaginary" that has its origins in the Abrahamic religions, the European Enlightenment and colonial expansion

(Suša, 2016, see Chapter Five). As a discourse and movement, its vision radically digresses from economic orthodoxies, yet so far needs to do more work to situate itself within the long history of social movements and theories that have been challenging those over the last 200 years.

To overcome both its ahistoricism and Eurocentrism, Part II opened with the use of the CMoP as a method for first historicising, and second provincialising degrowth. First, Chapter Five analysed the historical processes that led to the contemporary need for degrowth: the initial formation of merchant capitalism and accompanying processes of enclosure and colonialism. I subsequently argued that those socioeconomic processes, accompanied by scientific developments from the 17th century onwards, have transformed European cosmology. The view of nature changed from one of being alive to being a mechanism, which transformed inherent normative constraints on natural resource exploitation into sanctioning of the same (Merchant, 2020). I suggested that the organistic view placed *cosmological* limits to growth on society, while the mechanistic view on nature abolishes those. I define cosmological limits to growth as normative constraints to environmental exploitation that are inherent in worldviews based on connectedness to nature, present in pre-capitalist European and contemporary Andean practices. Cosmological limits embed humans into nature. While all 'limits' are socially constructed and physically present, this embeddedness restrains growth before it breaches socioecological limits. I therefore argued that the mechanistic view of nature as a resource, in contrast, represents the cultural foundation of the economic growth paradigm. To certain extents, the latter is thus contingent on the former. The chapter furthermore posited that degrowth relies

on mechanistic, anthropocentric conceptualisations of the environment that separate nature from culture. Degrowth's ecological analysis of growth therefore unwittingly perpetuates the 'coloniality of nature'. To overcome the latter within degrowth, I presented cultural and political alternatives to those; namely, attributing agency to the living world, and legally enshrining the aliveness of the earth through Rights of Nature.

(Latin) American thinkers have argued that if the left – and by extension, degrowth – continue to conceptualise socialism/communism or indeed, the commons, within a solely European framework, they will not succeed in “establishing fruitful cooperation with progressive forces of the non-Western [that is, the majority] world” (Mignolo, 2011b; see also García Linera, 2005; and Means, 1983).

Therefore, Part II proceeded with a case study of *Buen Vivir* to interrogate how Kichwa cosmologies and social practices may contribute toward a decolonial re-framing of the degrowth debate. The case study itself found that the political economy of the political project of *Buen Vivir/ sumak kawsay* (BV/sk) is founded on a relational ontology. Spiritual and material wellbeing is contingent on good relationships within families and communities, as well as with the natural elements. I argue that this affective and spiritual abundance produces psychological wellbeing through relational justice. Embeddedness into nature, community, and spiritual structures therefore produces not just economic, but psychological and social benefits.

However, the case study has also shown that communities that are able to work towards their version of a life in plenitude (*sumak kawsay*) have to undo more

than (development-as-)growth in practice. While economic relationships based on reciprocity and solidarity embed people into human and non-human communities, they are also affected by interlinking systems of patriarchy, the sociocultural and economic effects of migration and above all, the impacts of state-sanctioned environmental exploitation.

With regards to political ontology, my case study strengthened preceding arguments for conceptualising ways of being, thinking, and living as cosmological limits to growth. If Nature is seen as a life-giver (and/or harvest destroyer), she is treated respectfully. Ontology matters, as it mandates and prefigures our world-making practices. I argue that the world-making practices of BV/sk constitute cosmological limits to growth. These world-making practices can be used to actively construct a socially, ecologically and economic just society, as the protagonists of the case study have shown. This analysis complements efforts made by Nirmal and Rocheleau (2019), who deliver an indigenous and (eco-)feminist critique of degrowth based on ontological, epistemological and cultural differences from the perspective of the Zapatistas in Mexico and Adivasi communities in southern India. Based on my engagement with Andean practices of *sumak kawsay*, I argue that degrowth can address its Eurocentric focus by incorporating the following five lessons.

The first lesson degrowth can learn is that abundance isn't only found in the provision and enjoyment of universal public services and/or democratic control of political and economic processes (the much sought-after autonomy in degrowth discourses). To undo logics of growth or development in practice requires the

production of affective and spiritual abundance too, which would place limits on production, that is, material and energy throughput, well before ecological limits were breached. The collective production of wellbeing would thereby no longer depend on the state as principal redistributor of resources. That is positive in the sense that the state is also the principle purveyor of patriarchy and authoritarianism, especially, but not only, in Latin America (Lang et al., 2019, p. 370). The political economy of BV/sk is framed by the production of affective and spiritual abundance through reciprocity with human and non-human communities. I have argued that this type of relational justice produces psychological wellbeing. It also embeds the natural into the social world from a cultural and political perspective, which complement degrowth's ecosystems services perspective. This type of wellbeing can be constructed collectively, outside the welfare state. Learning from BV/sk, I therefore argue that degrowth can open up to a de-individualised conceptualisation of abundance, beyond provision and enjoyment of universal basic services.

Second, the experiences of housing cooperatives in Quito, the Sarayakus in the Amazon and mestizo communities in Intag show that degrowth can learn from their serious and sustained engagement with, and challenge of power. This means engaging with the state and the ways it has been captured by (multinational) business interests (Durand, 2019; for initial discussions of degrowth and the state, see amongst others D'Alisa and Kallis, 2020; Lang et al., 2020; Petridis et al., 2020). Relations of power pervade communities and social structures too, as this thesis has explored with regards to the CMoP. Certainly, as the case study has shown for the respective contexts, to live well means to live in community. The case study,

however, has also shown that rather than romanticising life in community, bioregions, or indeed the 'local' itself, their social structures are often hierarchical and discriminatory. Delinking from these structures of domination requires work and an approach based on social justice. A community must therefore not only share economic benefits, but relational justice.

Third, degrowth arguably de-links from the coloniality of the economy, and notions of wealth defined by consumption of material goods. This, however, is just one pillar of the CMoP. The civilisational crisis challenges political philosophers and theorists of (degrowth) transformation to think beyond modern/colonial categories that separate subjects from object, nature from culture, domestic from public space. In the context of a civilisational crisis, I suggest the political philosophy of degrowth considers entanglements, or patches, of resurgence (Tsing, 2015, chap. 13) that challenge the idea that history is produced by white, male executives and extend our epistemology to that of decolonial feminisms, for example, analysed in Chapter Seven. Furthermore, it ought to engage with the idea of the co-production of history, which is contingent on natural factors, species and climate, recognising the entanglement and inseparability of human political actors from the rest of the living world. Chapters Five and Six have shown that de-linking from the CMoP, for example through feminist knowledge systems, practices or theories, as well as those ostensibly considered 'subaltern', creates spaces that foster a pluriversalistic vision of degrowth, grounded in the recognition and negotiation of difference.

Fourth, the subsection on the political economy of BV/sk has shown up certain weaknesses and limitations (see '7.1. Affective Abundance: The Political Economy of Buen Vivir/ sumak kawsay'). Chiefly, the lack of operationalisation of reciprocity, or rather, explication of how solidarity can be implemented on a larger scale (for an exception see Lang, 2018). Although the chapter has sketched out some views on how reciprocity could be implemented on an international scale, these actions seemed to be dependent on state capture by *Pachakutik* or other political actors friendly to the indigenous movement. Actors who work towards their version of BV/sk could learn from the macro- and microeconomics of degrowth, reviewed in Part I, for a more systematic implementation of the solidarity principle in public policy and economic relations. These are, however, also dependent on state capture by degrowth friendly groups. The political economy of solidarity is therefore contingent on those spaces that operate outside a capitalist and market logic, on convivial spaces that both degrowth and BV/sk scholarship tend to romanticise.

Fifth, the engagement with indigenous thought and practice gives impetus to discussions around the cultural direction of transition processes beyond socioeconomic change. I argue that degrowth has so far prioritised emphasis on the latter, to the detriment of the former. This thesis has shown up this limitation and corrects for this bias. Consequently, environmental movements in the North may take away the following lessons from engagement with place-based thought and decolonial theories:

- the nature/culture divide relies on mechanistic, anthropocentric social constructions, which facilitate the imperial mode of living. It produces the over-exploitation of our only home/planet.
- talking about the 'living world', rather than 'resources' is a first step toward undoing that divide. The language of resources facilitates their incorporation into economic models, and by extension, the market, e.g. through neoliberal conservation models (e.g. Payments for Ecosystems Services).
- enshrining Rights of Nature into legal statutes is an imperfect, but viable way of extending political, social and legal agency to the living world in order to protect it from over-exploitation.

Table 8.1. provides an overview of the mutual areas of dialogue between degrowth and BV/sk, with a view to strengthening the viability of both systemic alternatives. The table represents the outcomes of an inter-epistemic dialogue. This dialogue must be understood as a contribution, and invitation, to the democratisation of the relationships between civilisational horizons. It may, as it will, open up a space for "inter-civilisational deliberation" (Lang et al., 2019, p. 371). Such deliberation would recognise modes of being and knowing that differ from modernity/coloniality. More importantly, it would give them analytical weight in the search for how to live well, that is, ethically, morally, materially, spiritually, socially, economically, within planetary boundaries. The most important conclusion is that neither degrowth nor BV/sk are *the* solution to the civilisational crisis. Instead, this table is an example of the *ecology of knowledges* that will be required to address the intersecting problems and hierarchies of this

crisis in an equitable, decolonial manner. The dialogue articulated in the table therefore sketches a decolonial, normative framework for the political economy and ontology of degrowth. It is based on the preceding chapters' theoretical analyses and data collection in the field:

	Degrowth	<i>Buen Vivir/ sumak kawsay</i>	Conditions and criteria for equitable dialogue
Philosophy of Being and Knowing			
Ontology	Ecological analysis of growth founded on mechanistic ontology: conception of nature as materials, i.e. inputs for human economy on which the satisfaction of human needs and wants depend	Relational ontology: nature is alive and has agency, embodied in Pachamama who produces and sustains life on earth; human existence relational to other humans and non-human (spiritual and material) beings	Ontological Pluralism: recognise pluriverse of existences and respect territorialised resistance to imposition of one-world-worldview
Epistemology	Scientific Method, objectiveness and abstraction; use of modelling for the production of scientific evidence	Ancestral knowledge, recuperated and/or from direct and indirect consultation; mix between scientific and ancestral knowledge	Epistemological Pluralism: think about conditions or parameters by which indigenous knowledges are “included”, or otherwise
Praxis			

Co-constitutive relationship between theory and practice	Pronounced goal in degrowth scholarship; however, only few empirical studies of degrowth in practice	Theoretical discussions of BV/sk talk of its origin in indigenous life worlds, but there is little research on BV/sk in practice	Locally contingent challenges to economic growth or development-as-growth ought to be accompanied intellectually by degrowth and BV/sk or postcolonial/ postdevelopment scholars (i.e. think <i>with</i> movements)
Feminist analysis	Loosely based on eco-feminist and feminist economist analyses, but focus on macroeconomic analysis and production and consumption processes to detriment of class and sex-based analysis	Absence of feminist proposals in constitutive mandate of BV/sk, e.g. gender or sexual diversity, women's reproductive rights etc.	<p>Recognition of gendered nature of social and economic reproduction processes;</p> <p>Engage in processes of de-patriarchisation and democratisation (involvement of, and increase in, women's participation in political processes)</p>

	<p>Ahistoric approach to feminist analyses that precede degrowth scholarship, but articulate similar critiques</p>	<p>BV/sk as grassroots project based on ideas of decolonial and communitarian feminists which are embedded in territory; body/territory as analytical category, BV/sk as government project based on liberal and eco-feminists and feminist economists focuses on redistribution of resources, equal opportunities and women's rights in the workplace</p>	<p>End appropriation of female academic labour in construction of scholarship & situate projects within feminist traditions</p>
	<p>Attempts at embodied analyses through framework of 'Economy of Care' in which social and economic reproduction processes are equally valued</p>		<p>Address feminisation of poverty in politics and economics of degrowth and BV/sk</p> <p>Degrowth scholarship would benefit from work with indigenous, peasant or otherwise marginalised women and communities, as well as from transcending anthropocentrism in feminist analysis</p>

			BV/sk as political project must challenge interlinking patriarchies; both discourses would benefit from displacement of unitary category of 'woman' and recognise multiple intersections of oppression
Reproduction of Life	Central to degrowth proposals, tied to social metabolism	Central aim of BV/sk as political project, tied to feminist analysis and women-nature nexus	Reproduction of life isn't an empathetic, i.e. explicit goal of degrowth, but should be, as it centres the role of women and nature
Articulation of limits	Thermodynamics approach leads to recognition of 'hard' limits to human development such as planetary boundaries	Pachamama (mother/ earth time) places cosmological limits to growth, i.e. normative constraints on human economies and ways of life	Recognise that while 'limits' are socially constructed and physically present, a relational understanding of 'limits' embeds humans into nature, placing cosmological limits on growth before social and/or ecological ones are breached
	Sustainability of economy is measured against violation or otherwise of these limits	Sustainability of economy is measured against ability to reproduce life for current and future generations with few quantitative approaches	Use of 'Living World' instead of 'materials' emphasises interconnectedness between human and non-human nature

Methodology	Economic valuation methods Qualitative studies	Little empirical work Mostly theoretical discussions	Both methodological approaches would benefit from more qualitative studies and empirical work on how the respective projects are or can be implemented in practice BV/sk could make use of quantitative approaches, including measuring biocapacity, to strengthen conceptual arguments
Economic Analysis	Ecological Economics, Feminist Economics & post-capitalist approaches	Feminist Economics, Economy of Care, Ecological Economics, Community and Solidarity Economy	Both economic approaches would benefit from a more serious theoretical and empirical engagement with principle of solidarity that is embedded in both
			Articulate role of local and regional markets as resistance to <i>global</i> market
Relationship between society and nature	Based on subordination of economy to social wellbeing and ecological sustainability	Spiritual element in relationship with nature that is foundational to psychological and communal wellbeing	Rights of Nature (RoN) as non-reformist reform
	Society depends on ecosystem services	Nature as life-giver – Mother Earth not symbol, but reality	RoN protect ontological & epistemological pluralisms and attribute agency in form of legal standing to non-human nature

Political economy & public policies	Public ownership and control over resources, including money and debt	Public-communitarian partnerships for upkeep & investment of public services and good	Public policy cross-pollination with regards to macroeconomics & notions of public investment
	Resource caps and ecological taxes	<i>Mingas</i> and other forms of reciprocal production processes	BV/sk as political project often operates at grassroots, or regional levels – resource caps and ecological taxes could be negotiated at that level, but leakages and spill-overs are likely to occur
	Emphasis on use-value rather than exchange value	Economic production to mobilise redistribution and affective abundance	Notion of affective abundance pushes degrowth to expand conception of production processes as means to satisfy needs, but also to redistribute and generate feelings, which pose affective limits on production
	Co-operative production & prosumption	Co-operative production & self-sufficiency for food sovereignty	For degrowth, public-communitarian partnerships could be models for post-growth welfare states in industrialised countries: they forego a dependency-creating, top-down welfare state while providing infrastructure or technical expertise for collective generation of wellbeing within communities

	(Re-)localisation of production processes & supply chains	Internationalisation of solidarity	
	Job Guarantee, Job Shares, Reduction in Working Hours	Strengthening of Regional and Local Markets	
Ecological / climate justice	Degrowth transition aims for social and ecological justice	Commoning of justice processes Ecological justice through territorialisation of resistance	Examination and quantification of historical ecological debt of Global North to South & incorporation into degrowth policy proposals
Democracy	Direct Democracy central to degrowth transformation	Commoning of decision-making processes, at local or municipal levels	Radical pluralism grounded in differences, not heterogeneity of groups
	Political autonomy through self-governance	Commoning of resource governance	Re-examine collective identities (e.g. ‘the nation’) for totalising and hierarchical in-out structures that negate difference
	Decentralisation and re-localisation of democratic institutions (“eco-municipalism” and citizen assemblies) and alternatives to (complement and/or replace) parliamentary democracy	Direct democracy in indigenous communities sits alongside parliamentary democracy at national level	Radical Democracy that connects people through duties and obligations, rather than rights – increases potential for common resource governance Re-examine the role of private property rights in producing disconnect from Living World

Technology	Well-articulated theory and critique of technology as socio-technical system or sociological phenomenon that results in the standardisation, rationalisation and <i>impersonality</i> of economic and political life	Place-based and ancestral technologies that ensure the reproduction of life	Knowledge sharing and technology transfer
			Interrogate waste products and material life cycles of renewable energy technologies
			Discontinue production of electronics using rare earth and other metals that are mined industrially
Engagement with the State	State principal actor in macroeconomics, but supplemented by communitarian ownership models in microeconomics	Plurinationality & interculturality as conditions for implementation of BV/sk in indigenous communities	Transformation of people from category of citizens into <i>collective</i> social and political actors

Table 8.1 Decolonial Framework for Politics of Degrowth through Dialogue with *Buen Vivir/ sumak kawsay*

Degrowth considers the Newtonian, mechanistic conception of the economy as one of the foundational problems in economics. This mechanism is argued to have given rise to the obsession with economic growth and development-as-growth. In this thesis, I argued that degrowth ought to extend this analysis to the non-human world. Moreover, I suggested that the mechanistic view of nature as resources emerged together with the colonial global economy and Scientific Revolution (Allan, 2018; Bhambra, 2020; Merchant, 2020). Overall, it has since become the cultural foundation of the economic growth paradigm. In this thesis, I have extended the areas of cultural studies, history of thought, and post- and decolonial studies to degrowth. To substantiate my arguments, the case study of BV/sk explored political economy, gender politics, and political ontology in Ecuadorian communities.

In contrast to degrowth, the political ontology of BV/sk is relational and situated within a circular temporality. In that sense, both degrowth and BV/sk represent attempts to overcome the mechanistic, linear world view that imposes no limits to growth and development, neither ecological nor philosophical, or indeed ethical ones. However, I have argued that BV/sk in practice embodies cosmological limits to growth. These are normative constraints to economic growth that embed humans into nature. I suggest that such relational understanding of limits would immensely enrich the cultural politics of degrowth. Re-articulating cosmological limits to growth would overcome degrowth's anthropocentrism, make it an attractive ally for environmental justice movements from the Global South, and provincialise its own, mechanistic conception of nature.

Indigenous practice and theory has therefore shown up the limitations of the nature/culture divide, which spilled from the natural into the social sciences of the Western academies. Kichwa cosmologies favour complementary over dichotomy. In other words, humans interact with nature – and other humans – reciprocally, and subject and object aren't mutually exclusive. How can the (Western) social sciences move beyond this mutually exclusive binary, when many natural sciences, in particular ecology, has begun to do so? Movements in the Global North such as degrowth are grappling with this dilemma. On the one hand, they need to incorporate nature into economic models as resources in order to provide evidence-based solution to the environmental crises. On the other hand, the incorporation of natural capital into these models facilitates the commodification of nature, which they criticise. In response to this dilemma, and in dialogue with BV/sk, this thesis proposes to enshrine cosmological limits to growth, that is, the acknowledgement of the living world's agency, in Rights of Nature. In short, the closing of the nature/culture dichotomy in degrowth scholarship.

8.2.2. Contribution to Knowledge and Relevance of the Study

This is the first systematic examination of degrowth as an effective political system vis-à-vis North-South relations. In other words, this study is the first to examine degrowth in a *global* context of modernity/coloniality. It analyses the embeddedness of the degrowth literature in colonial analytical categories and the CMoP in general. As such, it fills one of the most important gaps in the degrowth literature: the explicit theorisation and practical situatedness of its policy proposals within the violent processes of colonialism and neo-colonialism.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ For an exception, see Hickel (2020).

Thereby, this research contributes to a construction of future possibilities that, while allowing us to make different mistakes in constructing them (Andreotti and Stein, 2015), will not embed epistemological and ontological hierarchies between peoples, and between people and non-human beings, between genders, sexualities, and abilities into the social imaginary of a future degrowth society. In arguing for collective, rather than individualised conceptualisations of abundance, this thesis has furthermore anticipated debates that are taking place at time of publication (Mehta and Harcourt, 2021).

The philosophical proposals contained in this thesis – the agency of the living world, Rights of Nature and above all, the call for a re-articulation of *cosmological limits to growth* – contribute to future possibilities that do not separate us from either Others or the natural world. Re-constituting cosmological limits to growth brings with it possibilities of ecological and relational justice. This finding contributes to recent degrowth and political ecology scholarship that questions the mainstream environmental conceptualisation of ‘limits’ as hard borders (e.g. planetary boundaries; Kallis, 2019). In and of itself, these limits, while having the potential to guide policy, do not contain growthism – “growth for its own sake” – that is built into capitalism (Hickel, 2020, p. 20). They also complement an overtly constructivist conceptualisation of limits as internal, morally constructed boundaries (Kallis, 2019). Cosmological limits to growth embed humans into nature, rather than separating the two. Cultural direction through a change in the way we think – and eventually, act toward – the environment will be instrumental to avoid the destabilisation of organised life on planet earth.

Furthermore, this research has been conducted at a time when our relationship with nature has become ever more destructive, visibly so. It has also, however, come at a time when movements are increasingly challenging this relationship and demanding change. Examples are Fridays for Future, the Sunrise Movement, Green New Deal in Europe and North America, *Pacto Ecosocial del Sur/ América Latina y Caribe* (Eco-social Pact of the South and Latin America and the Caribbean), the Basic/Earth/Care Income networks across the globe, and many more. As such, the findings of this thesis connect the intellectual dots between different movements and political projects that aim to articulate a vision of how to live well within *cosmological* boundaries. The findings of this thesis seek to contribute to degrowth, as well as postdevelopment and postcolonial scholarship. The normative, decolonial framework presented above seeks to advance knowledge production around both degrowth and Buen Vivir. It lays out areas for further research, as well as the conditions for an equitable dialogue, akin to an ecology of knowledges that is arguably needed to address the civilisational crisis.

Two additional important milestones this thesis has produced are the political trajectory of BV/sk and an empirical study of its practice. The former complements those genealogies that have been published in the Spanish-language literature. The latter is an especially valuable contribution, since neither Spanish-language nor Anglophone studies have engaged much directly with the protagonists of the BV/sk political project. In contrast, the case study elicited how it is implemented in practice – one of the few empirical studies to do so, both in English and Spanish. Finally, the case study and thesis in general may serve to introduce BV/sk in detail to a political economy audience. While BV/sk has been popularised mostly within

the postdevelopment and postcolonial scholarship, political economy as practiced and taught in the Western academies hasn't yet engaged much with this civilisational alternative from Latin America.

In locating the degrowth debate within the decolonial struggles against the CMoP, its Eurocentric and anthropocentric aspects are invariably challenged without dislocating the discourse from its geographical and socio-economic places of relevance. I thereby aim to expand the debate from a critique of development towards an alternative *to* development that is situated in a global context and thus relates to an understanding of modernity to which coloniality was and is constitutive. "Decolonising" public debate from "the idiom of economism", as demanded by degrowth (D'Alisa et al., 2014a, p. 3), cannot happen without the acknowledgment of the violent processes of colonisation that have been shaping the modern world. A decolonial relocation of the discourse allows alliances to be built, overcoming the CMoP and *recognising others' struggles as struggles for another form of life*. Even if those do not resemble our image of a degrowth society, they equally aim to deconstruct ideologies of economic growth and development-as-growth.

8.2.3. Limitations

This study was constrained by some factors. While those may affect the generalisability of certain results, they do not impede overall validity. Part I has been limited to a desk-based research consisting of a literature review and hermeneutic analyses. One of the constrictions here arises out of the fast development of the degrowth literature, which has grown exponentially even

since the start of this thesis in 2016. Some of my points of criticism, such as its lack of engagement with theories and practices from the Global South have since then begun to be addressed. They have, however, not been overcome within the five years of writing this thesis. Furthermore, the literature review is restricted to the following two points: why degrowth is viable and desirable, and what degrowth proposes in theory and practice. This thesis has not much engaged with the *how*, that is, what strategies the degrowth movement has pursued or may pursue in the future to implement a degrowth transformation, and at which levels. The question of strategy has come to play a more predominant role from the 6th International Degrowth Conference 2018 in Malmö onwards. Furthermore, the degrowth literature review in Part I excludes the many degrowth books that were published in 2020.

In relation to degrowth, Part II of this thesis examined degrowth's ecological analysis of growth only. The relationship of its political and cultural analyses of growth towards nature have been examined elsewhere (Brown, 2018; Demmer and Hummel, 2017; Paulson, 2014). Furthermore, a systematic engagement of how degrowth delinks or otherwise from other axes of the CMoP and the bolts holding it together (e.g. race, capital) would have been beyond the scope of this thesis. Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic sparked a massive uptick in mainstream mentions, controversies and discussions about degrowth, what it is and isn't, and how the pandemic may have opened up political and public appetite for degrowth ideas and policies. Due to its scope, however, this thesis does not analyse the pandemic's effects on the contents of the degrowth scholarship, nor on its popularity and practical, that is, political, feasibility.

With regards to BV/sk, it must be stressed that the projects and cases presented aren't free from internal contradictions, difficulties and hierarchies. Nevertheless, the case study has shown the efforts of particular communities to undo the CMoP, and to construct their version of BV/sk. While this has allowed for certain extrapolations – mainly of the underlying principles of their political economy, ontology and gender politics – these findings apply to those communities. They should not be generalised to other communities, neither in Ecuador nor in Latin America more generally. Generalisability, however, does not impede validity in this case, nor the emergence of the inter-epistemic dialogues that the findings have produced.

As with any research, the BV/sk case study has generated at least as many questions as it has answered. For one, the process of addressing the research questions has been complicated by the global spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020. The arrival of Covid-19 in Ecuador and subsequent border closures significantly disrupted the data collection process, effectively halving the available time. After having met interlocutors from three different communities, two in the Southern, and one in the Northern Highlands of Ecuador, I had planned to spend the remaining time doing in-depth case studies of what *sumak kawsay* means for one of these communities in practice. However, Ecuador's national lockdown was put in place the weekend I had planned to travel. Some of the questions that remain open may well have been answered in these case studies, especially with regards to the existence of *sumak kawsay* as practice (or social phenomenon), as opposed

to discourse, and the economic, political, social and cultural details of that practice.

8.3. Practical applications

This thesis has found that degrowth presents an alternative economic and political system for growth-dependent, high-income nations that exceed their fair share of global biocapacity. In contrast, BV/sk is a decolonial, grassroots project that challenges the various intersecting aspects of the so-called civilisational crisis (anthropocentrism, racism, patriarchy etc.). While each project is locally contingent, the delinking of BV/sk from intersecting axes of the CMoP marks it as holistic transformation project that provides important insights for degrowth scholarship. Most importantly, that attributing agency to Nature raises a series of epistemological and ontological challenges to the economies of growth and degrowth. Conceptualising non-human nature as the Living World configures epistemological and ontological changes that affect interactions between society and nature. The biggest implication of these findings is therefore that to overcome environmental exploitation, we mustn't just change our political and economic institutions, but the *way we think* about the environment, or rather, the Living World. Reinscribing normative constraints on natural resource exploitation, in other words, engaging *cosmological limits to growth*, requires a cultural transformation of a magnitude that has not yet been acknowledged by degrowth scholarship. Mobilising *affective* abundance beyond public abundance of goods and services requires the engagement of economic processes for redistribution

and the generation of solidarity. These are the synergies between degrowth and BV/sk.

This thesis is of interest to practitioners *and* theorists of systemic alternatives in North and South, as well as policymakers. Accordingly, I suggest the consideration of RoN as part of policymaking and degrowth advocacies. Theoretically, RoN open a discussion on ontological pluralism, which challenges the nature/culture dichotomy and thereby, is useful for the Cartesian growth critique of degrowth. Implementing RoN has serious consequences for the respective local, national, or even global political economy. RoN would resituate the economy within non-human nature and human society. RoN could therefore become a highly useful legal and analytical instrument for degrowth. Furthermore, to avoid dislocating degrowth from its place of relevance, the indigenous world doesn't have to be the only route into RoN. The European romantic movement, for instance, could be a place-based referent for RoN in Europe and degrowth movement alike (Acosta, 2020). As such, the indigenous response to RoN is a cosmologically contingent approach that, like BV/sk, arose at the interface of development and indigenous organisations in an effort to mediate ontological conflicts between the indigenous and Western worldviews (Novo, 2018; Velasque, 2020). In addition to the European Romantics, the science of ecology could be a cosmologically contingent approach in Europe. To conclude, the contribution of this thesis lies in the recognition of the ontological divergences between degrowth and BV/sk and their synthesis into a decolonial, normative framework for the politics of degrowth.

8.4. Recommendations for future research

This research raises a number of interesting directions for further degrowth and BV/sk scholarship. Universal Basic Income (UBI) is one of degrowth's most advocated public policies and has gained further traction during the Covid-19 pandemic. Evidence for its effectiveness and usefulness, however, is mixed (Gibson et al., 2018). Apart from a lack of clarity regarding its financing, there's little indication that a UBI alone would reduce consumption to sustainable enough levels (Kalaniemi et al., 2020), although there is evidence for improvements in health, poverty and education (Berman, 2018; Forget, 2011). I recommend future degrowth scholarship present quantitative (and qualitative) evidence in support of that particular key policy.

The question of political strategy remains perhaps the most contested and open debate within degrowth. There can be no doubt that it will have to be operating at different scales. To become politically relevant, degrowth eventually needs to engage with the state and the multinational corporations that entangle industrial economies and their societies with the communities who are exposed to resource extractivism in the Global South. It would ensue that subsequent relevant analyses would examine how degrowth scholarship delinks or otherwise from the other axes of the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMoP, e.g. intersubjectivity and knowledge, authority, sex and gender) and how its scholarship and activism engages with the interaction of capital, racism and knowledge that upholds the CMoP. Likewise, BV/sk scholarship would benefit from more sustained engagement with its

practice. In contrast to degrowth, BV/sk would also benefit from a more analytically rigorous systematisation of its political economy.

With regards to the coloniality of nature, this thesis has opened an entire new field with which degrowth scholarship could fruitfully engage –Rights of Nature (RoN) and its potentials and limitations in supporting and protecting the pluriverse. The pluriverse refers to the multitude of modes of existences that are threatened by the imposition of the one-world worldview via industrial environmental exploitations in extractive frontiers. In addition to RoN, the concept of the ‘Living World’ prompts engagement with another new field within transition narratives: how can consumer societies transform their relationships with nature towards built-in, normative constraints on environmental exploitation? How can we re-embed the cosmological limits to growth once prevalent in European cosmology? How can we, in effect, re-enchanted nature without losing the vantage point of reason? Furthermore, questions raised in this thesis require more empirical studies on how communities, municipalities, regions etc. implement degrowth and BV/sk in practice.

The central finding of this thesis has been that mechanism is the cultural foundation of the economic growth paradigm. This implies that the degrowth process requires not just political, but cultural direction. Given that both organised human life and non-human life is threatened at a scale never seen before, this isn't just the task of degrowth scholarship. Political theory in general needs to continue to question and operationalise its roots in the violent processes of colonialism, slavery and the appropriation of nature. The main points of departure

are challenging and overcoming the pretence of the universalism of liberal (and Marxist) political theory, which precludes acknowledgment of, and engagement with, other ways of knowing that while not grounded in the scientific method, are equally valid. Following on from this, this thesis aims to challenge modern political theory's reductive thinking when it comes to political agency, the entanglement of human life with the non-human world, as well as the economic rationalities that pervade its analyses of liberty, freedom and autonomy. The civilisational crisis that confronts us requires that both political theory and political economy overcome their anthropocentric aspects, and move on from the kinds of dichotomies and binaries that ecology and earth system sciences have long since moved on from. Time has run out on reductive thinking and separating the human from the non-human world. To sustain life on planet earth, our theories and conceptual tools need to drastically change, and quickly. This thesis has been a modest contribution toward that end: in locating degrowth within the CMoP and connecting it with Buen Vivir/sumak kawsay, a systemic alternative from Ecuador and Latin America.

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