Degrowth Dilemmas

Analysing the discourse of movement advocates

in the debate on growth

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Abstract

The degrowth movement offers an ambitious vision and proposal for a civilisational and ecological transformation alongside a coalition of *transition discourses*. Degrowth is growing in popularity among other *green political economy discourses*. However, it is still relatively unknown and politically undesirable compared to *green growth*. If it is accepted that the success of social movements is contingent, in part, on their discourse, then it becomes imperative that a gap in research on degrowth discourse be filled. This thesis examines why the degrowth movement remains marginal. I apply social movement theorising on framing and collective identity in a critical discourse analysis of intellectual advocates engaged in the debate on economic growth and degrowth. I offer observations in the form of dilemmas and invite proponents of degrowth to reflect on how their rhetoric contributes to the marginality of the movement.

Degrowth proponents use negative frames and deviant language in an attempt to resist co-option and overcome the hegemonic growth paradigm. Paradoxically, some actors also reinforce master frames in an attempt to make persuasive arguments. This can be incongruent with the movement's aims of decentering the logic of growth in their debates and for building alliances. I illustrate how movement intellectuals draw from the social languages of activists and scientists. When mixing the two cultures, they engage in *tightrope talk* and wield a *double-edged sword*. In a creative struggle, they use standard language in novel ways, counter–frame and reorient an understanding of the debate about economic growth, society and the environment. Doing so galvanises the degrowth movement and affirms their collective identity but simultaneously can agitate actual or potential allies from affiliated movements. I discuss how intellectual advocates might attract support and populate the margins of green political economy discourse if they see that they are also literary thinkers, coalition builders and creators of new stories, that support the degrowth proposal. They too have a role in empowering new narratives in support of heterogeneous transition pathways towards a post-growth future.

Keywords: Degrowth, post-growth, sustainable transition, green political economy, discourse analysis, framing, social movement, collective identity.
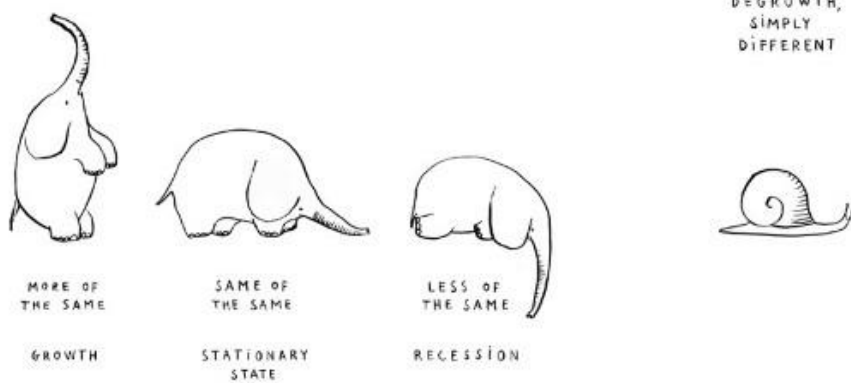
Acknowledgements

I wish to make an *Acknowledgement of Country* statement, which is customary in Australia where I have previously lived and will return to on completion of this thesis. I acknowledge the Wadjuk people of the Noongar Nation as the custodians of the Boodja (land) and all that lives there. I honour their kin in other Aboriginal Nations as the longest continuously living culture of people in the world. I also acknowledge First Nations Elders, past and present, in other lands. I recognise that those of us who came from across the seas live on land that was stolen. I acknowledge the responsibility that comes with this understanding, and that I personally, and many more collectively, benefit from this theft. As such, we have a responsibility to decolonise ourselves, our lives and work.

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1 Introduction

> *The deepest crises experienced by any society are those moments of change*
> *when the story becomes inadequate for meeting the survival demands of a*
> *present situation*
> — Thomas Berry, Dream of the Earth (1988)

How will we respond to a multidimensional — climate, economy, social and environmental — crisis? In the face of a changing climate, it is now widely accepted as necessary to transition to a socially just and low-carbon society (Nisbet 2009; Pettenger 2016). The *sustainable development discourse* is now widely adopted, and the *ecological modernisation discourse* is especially popular in European and developed nations (Dryzek 2013). They tout the greening of economic growth as vital if we, as a global community, are to address social needs, end poverty and respond to pressures on the environment and climate (OECD 2019; United Nations n.d.). It is easy to see why the stories one can tell about "greening the economy" have been able to captivate the hearts and minds of scientific, political and economic elites (Hajer 1995; Machin 2019). For decades the rhetoric of "it's the economy, stupid" and "there is no alternative" has been salient.[1] Perhaps there is no need to throw out the economy and modern comforts when techno-optimism and corporatist solutions with the existing artillery of capitalism can bring about a more sustainable future, low carbon future (Dryzek 2013).

Not so fast. Infinite economic growth is a contentious part of the urgent and necessary public discussion on how to respond to social and environmental crises. Moreover, there is no agreement as to what type of socio-economic transformation is necessary, let alone what type of society we want an ecological turn to lead us to. Critics from *ecological economics* and few other heterodox fields attempt to dethrone the ideology of growth and dispel the idea that economic growth is compatible with environmental sustainability and emissions draw-down (Bina and La Camera 2011; Capellán-Pérez et al. 2015; Hamilton 2003; Hueting 2010; Hickel and Kallis 2019; O'Neill 2012). The Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* report in 1972 and Georgescu-Roegen's 1971 book *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* were both foundational works in the development of the field of ecological economics. In fact, both share roots with

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[1] These were aphorisms popularised under Clinton's political campaign and Thatcher's term as Prime Minister. The former to say that citizens care most of all about the economy over other electoral issues an the latter say that market economy is the only one that works.

popular sustainable development discourse that emerged out of the 1987 Brundtland Report (Levallois 2010; Martínez-Alier et al. 2010). Yet alternatives to a growth dependant society are not easily imaginable — transition stories have not yet permeated the zeitgeist (Audet 2016). "Despite the wealth of scientific debate and evidence, ecological economics and ecological rationality have hardly scratched the dominant economic rationality predicated on mechanistic logics" (Bina and La Camera 2011, 2314). *Green growth* has not proved to be a miracle cure in the decades that have passed since the sustainable development and limits to growth discourses emerged. "We still live in a world of unchecked consumerism, excessive materials use and fossil fuel addiction" (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1741).

This thesis does not aim to develop further the political economy or political ecology arguments for or against economic growth as a necessity to meet pressing social and environmental challenges. However, for the sake of laying a proper foundation, an overview of the debate is offered in Chapter 2. My point of departure is that social and political change "may well take place through the emergence of new storylines that re-order understandings" (Hajer 1995, 56). Moreover, economic and scientific logic alone have not been and will not be enough to address the multidimensional crisis blooming around the world (McCalman and Connelly 2019). Perhaps a radical societal transformation is in need after all? To mobilise such a vision, a movement or coalition of movements is urgently needed to address — with emancipatory and democratic solutions — the daunting challenges of climate change, global ecological and social injustice and the ensuing movement of migrants (Eversberg and Schmelser 2018, 266).

Enter *degrowth*: "In the eyes of degrowth proponents, economic growth, even if disguised as sustainable development, will lead to social and ecological collapse" (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1745). "Sustainable degrowth" aims to increase human wellbeing while reducing material consumption and demands on resource output (Kallis 2017, 8). Sounds similar to green growth, yes? No — a degrowth society would necessarily have negative growth; a decline in GDP. The stories of degrowth and green growth are diametrically opposed on one issue in particular: The impact the ecological turn or sustainable transition would have on economic growth (Demailly 2014). Unlike green growth, voluntary degrowth argues for the reorganisation and reimagination of society and the economy to align with pro-social and environmental values and consequently the deemphasis of economic growth (Alexander 2012; Kallis 2011;

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Kallis, Demaria, and D'Alisa 2015; O'Neill 2012; Schneider, Kallis, and Martinez-Alier 2010; Weiss and Cattaneo 2017). It is not to be confused with the involuntary degrowth, or recession, that follows economic crisis – Degrowth would be planned for and thus "a prosperous way down" (Odum and Odum 2006).

In this introduction chapter, I will go no further with definitions or descriptors of degrowth (I will see to this in Chapter 2), other than to say that degrowth is a provocative idea and "missile word" with intentions to shift discourse and paradigms about the economy, society and environment (Drews and Antal 2016). Degrowth is not a unified theory or political movement and that public and academic interest in degrowth is gaining traction. The movement draws energy from an activist-led academic scholarship, as well as many iterations of practical, homegrown, lifestyle initiatives. Degrowth now self-organises biennial international conferences.[2] It exists among a coalition of heterodox discourses — other *post-growth* transition proposals that are emerging in civil society, policy-making and social scientific research with some combination of concern for green, sustainable, low-carbon and just transformation of society (Audet 2016; Bauhardt 2014; Charonis 2012).

Though the degrowth movement has grown, it is relatively unknown and has had a negligible impact on political or economic discourse (Bina and La Camera 2011; Buch-Hansen 2018). Degrowth has, since the 1970s, remained marginal and not been the preferred antidote to modernity's social and ecological ailments.[3] This warrants serious reflection. Yet, there is an absence of scholarship on degrowth that discusses why degrowth remains marginal or what might be required of its proponents to popularise the movement (Buch-Hansen 2018). Moreover, degrowth scholarship has hardly begun to use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to consider how the discourses drawn on by degrowth proponents may contribute to their movements marginality. It is not a new feat to study discourse in relation to social, politics or economics for that matter — to ask questions of how do actors construct and understand social and environmental problems; aim to achieve discursive dominance on an issue; or create persuasive arguments and compelling stories that convince audiences and move people to act. Discourse is an essential factor in how people become persuaded or dissuaded

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[2] The most recent of them, the Degrowth Vienna 2020 conference, was held digitally during the Covid-19 Pandemic lockdowns.
[3] I use Escobar's (2008) definition of modernity, which makes reference the colonial powers that have marginalised and supressed subaltern groups their cultures and ways of knowing (162-163).

by another perspective that can be applied to study topics such as: *green political economy* (Barry 2007; Stevenson 2019)*;* the social construction climate change and low-carbon transitions (Kirby and O'Mahony 2018; Pettenger 2016); wind power resistance rhetoric (Barry, Ellis, and Robinson 2008); or acid rain policy (Hajer 1995). Although the study of discourse and application of discourse theory is commonplace, the normative potential of the tradition has been underutilised by green/ecological ethicists, politics and economists (Bruner and Oelschlaeger 1994; Luks 1998; McCloskey 1998). However, activists and scholars concerned by the currently unsustainable modus operandi or unlimited growth paradigm are increasingly placing pressure on social agents to create alternative stories through which humans can relate to the word (Bruner and Oelschlaeger 1994; Demmer and Hummel 2017; Hamilton 2010).

If the degrowth movement and its allies are to shift or replace the currently hegemonic paradigm beyond growth, actors will need to consider their discourse. "To achieve socio-ecological transformation towards a degrowth society, it is imperative to overcome and decentre the growth-imaginary and to build a new imaginary with fresh images concepts and narratives" (Demmer and Hummel 2017, 614). Without a compelling story, degrowth can read as an ambitious, if not an idealistic set of aspirations, from a growing yet niche movement.

1.1 Research questions, aims and objectives

This thesis applies a discourse analysis (specifically a CDA) approach to explore a debate of David and Goliath proportions. In it, I examine how the protagonists in this story are rhetorically fuelled and discursively constructed in order to understand why they are not (yet) winning. By listening beyond the words of the debate, I explore the challenges and possibilities actors face when advocating for degrowth (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2011).

The central research interest to be explored is: Why despite the need for transition stories, the degrowth movement's discourse remains marginal among the other green political economy discourses in the Global North. To address it, I examine discussions between various actors affiliated with the degrowth movement. These conversations

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are abundant with disputes and negotiations between actors. Through them, it can be observed how actors make sense of complex social and environmental problems and reconcile deeply held values, identities and practices. Their argumentation illustrates how certain actors frame the degrowth proposal, re-order an understanding of issues and counter–argue each other. As such, the texts that are not only *about* degrowth (an explanation of the movement's proposal) but are also texts in which part of the movement's discourse is actively being constructed.

The empirical focal point of the research is on the advocacy and argumentation of proponents, allies and opponents of post- and degrowth who have recently (within the last five years) engaged publically in this debate on economic growth and the environment. The actors broadly represent the spectrum of Eurocentric intellectual advocates engaged in the debate. They are considered to be thought leaders or movement intellectuals as their work and advocacy are influential in shaping the movement's discourse — more so than other movement participants do (McCalman and Connelly 2019).

To address the research problem, I ask a set of research questions. I seek to explore: **What, if anything, can be learnt about the marginality of degrowth movement from how movement intellectuals debate the degrowth proposal and defend their choice of framing?** I seek to analyse the corpus for the ways actors frame the degrowth transition and counter–frame green growth and other green economy ideas. Using the texts, I illustrate that how degrowth proponents frame the debate is often counterproductive for the movement's aims and may contribute to its marginality. I discuss the possible reasons for their framing incongruence and find that degrowthers are not as incoherent as their peers depict.

CDA queries how one's language, written or orated, can strategically aim to exercise social power and dominance (van Dijk 1993). So, this thesis aims to understand how hegemonic green political economy discourses (green pro-growth) maintain dominance over heterodox discourses. It also considers how these heterodox discourses might reproduce master frames and standard hegemonic discourses language (unwittingly or not) to be perceived as more persuasive (and legitimate) by their audiences. As such, this thesis will go beyond describing the degrowth debate to ask: **How are actors marginalising or advancing the degrowth movement through**

collective identity processes? I will apply the relational concepts of social movement framing and collective identity, to explore how proponents play a part in reproducing but also they attempt to be creative by re-framing the debate and how the issues in it are understood.

Although I take a critical stance, the goal of this analysis is not to *criticise* the actors whom I observe. Nor is it my aim to compare green political economy discourses to make predictive or prescriptive conclusions. Instead, I aim to illuminate dilemmas and opportunities for consideration by the degrowth proponents and their allies. Questions and aims such as mine may illuminate paradoxes for heterodox transition discourses (specifically for degrowth movement intellectuals) to consider as they struggle to popularise *genuinely* sustainable ways of thinking and acting. Without intending to be prescriptive, I will ask: **How can degrowth proponents and allies popularise their movement's vision through their intellectual advocacy?** As such, this thesis aims to help activist-academics develop more fertile stories and narratives in their scholarship and advocacy. I will argue that if degrowth is to be as radical and transformative as its proponents claim it to be, it will need to find 'winning' words and a broad coalition of support.

1.2   Structure of the thesis

To address its aims, this thesis is organised over eight chapters. In the subsequent chapter (Chapter 2) presents a transdisciplinary literature review that first presents a background to the debate on economic growth and the degrowth movement's position in the discussion. I will contextualise degrowth as a social movement, political project and academic community, then position it among a spectrum of heterodox discourse coalitions. In Chapter 3, I situate my thesis in the vast world of discourse theory and define the terms and analytical concepts used to the study of the degrowth movement's intellectual advocates. Chapter 4 presents the methodological approach of this thesis and argue for the appropriateness of the method and sources selected.

Chapter 5 and 6 present the kinds of conflicts, tensions and negotiations that are observable in the corpus of debates about economic growth and degrowth. The former chapter examines framing disputes; namely what the arguments for and against the use of negative framing used by degrowth can tell about the movement's marginality. I

then illustrate how degrowth proponents commonly conform to incongruent master frames and lack of counter frames in their discourse. I argue how doing so is not fruitful for the aims of the degrowth movement. The latter chapter analyses how collective identity is constructed by those inside and outside of the movement. I introduce the term tightrope talk to illustrate the creative struggle degrowth advocates face to empower new meanings and hybrid identities in support of degrowth. In each chapter, I discuss how argumentative processes (namely framing and collective identity processes) have paradoxical consequences for the marginality of the movement and the groups within it.

Chapter 7 brings together my analysis, literature and theory to postulate on what degrowth proponents, specifically intellectual advocates, can do to thicken their transition narratives and build discourse coalitions that better serve the goals of transitioning to a sustainable, post-growth future. In a final chapter, I recapitulate the core arguments made and dilemmas illuminated to answer the research questions. Offering concluding thoughts and reflections to my research, the theoretical and practical limitations, I suggest what further research and action would be beneficial. To close, the significance of the research problem is restated as I situate my conclusions in the broader contemporary and academic context.

2   The degrowth debate

 "You're a sociopath if you believe in green growth!" — Anonymous

I overheard this provocation, from down the corridor, while eagerly writing an essay inspired by Clive Hamilton's (2010) *Consumerism, self-creation and prospects for a new ecological consciousness.* It caught my attention and agitated me just as I was writing to suggest that movements like degrowth and transition towns offer people an opportunity to create new habits and identities. "That's no way to resolve a disagreement," I thought. I had critiqued green growth in my essay for not going far enough to address issues of inequality, expanding footprints and ecological degradation. However, it was disturbing to me that this kind of verbal conflict could surface between two educated individuals both in agreeance that anthropogenic climate change requiring urgent action. All the same, it made me wonder about the seemingly civil green political economy discourse I had been reading. What can the debate about the role of economic growth tell us about the degrowth movements discourse and why it has remained marginal?

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This personal reflection serves to illustrate not only a moment of inspiration in my research but also an observable hostility and precarious rhetorical tightrope that ideologically fueled debates traverse. It would seem as though there are two distinct and entrenched camps in the debate on the relationship between economic growth and the environment. However, this thesis will uncover nuances to the debate. Within economics, there are shades of grey between the supposed new classic economists and their adversaries (Klamer 1983). Likewise, in the debate between green growth and degrowth, ideological camps can blend. There are many other positions in the debate that influences the degrowth discourse — for example, those of ecological economics, post-growth or green economy thinkers. Even within degrowth, there is a spectrum of positions from radical to reformist. Thus, I wish to keep rhetorical distance from binary language to avoid dichotomies when the analysing the debate and describing degrowth movement.

The following chapter will elaborate on the arguments for and against green growth. I will also use the literature to illustrate that although hegemonic, green growth is not the only voice in a choir of other *green economy discourses*. I will position degrowth as one of these voices in a heterodox community of thought which argues the limits to growth and insists on a radical transformation of society. After which, I will conceptualise degrowth as a political project, an academic field and a social movement. A broad definition of degrowth, positioned in a constellation of other discourses serves to support the theoretical concepts introduced in Chapter 4 and applied throughout this thesis. A robust background is necessary to contextualise how shared and divergent meanings, identities and storylines are produced from actors and groups across the degrowth spectrum and its discourse coalitions.

2.1   To grow or degrow — is that the question?

To address unsustainable development, green growth is the favoured approach of leading multilateral organisations and agreements such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Paris Agreement, and to an extent, the Green New Deal(s) (Sandberg, Klockars, and Wilén 2019; Stoknes and Rockström 2018). Their definitions range from vague: "Green growth is the pursuit of economic development in an environmentally sustainable manner" (Green Growth Knowledge Platform 2016) to anthropocentric "Green Growth means fostering economic growth and development, while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies" (OECD 2019). Stoknes and Rockström (2018, 42) define green growth as an increase in economic output that lowers total environmental footprint so that future economies can thrive within physical planetary boundaries. They distinguish "genuine" green growth from grey growth by emphasising the need for "absolute decoupling of GDP growth from resource use: so that the economy grows while emissions fall" (42). They present evidence that absolute decoupling is not only theoretically possible but also empirically evident in the majority of the Nordic countries.

> If politicians, corporations and voters continue to prioritise economic growth, then *reframing* that to genuine green economic growth like — Sweden,

Denmark and Finland, and recently China — may be the only way forward that climate stability will allow for. Anything less will, according to current climate science, continue to overshoot the planetary boundaries and thus undermine the very human wellbeing that economic growth attempts to promote. (Stoknes and Rockström 2019, 47, emphasis added)

Green Growth shares "the neoliberal 'mantra' of the supremacy of markets for fostering prosperity through ever-growing efficiency," it relies on the privatisation of goods and services, economic globalisation and international governing bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation and the World Bank (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1741). Many other agents in the ecological turn share the (alleged) goals of green growth — avoid ecosystem collapse and enhance human wellbeing. Critics of the infinite economic growth logic, retort that absolute decoupling is not as easy to achieve as green growthers would have us believe and that it has failed to draw down emissions (Bina and La Camera 2011; Capellán-Pérez et al. 2015; Hickel and Kallis 2019). There are normative and intrinsic limitations to the green and sustainable growth modelling (Sandberg, Klockars, and Wilén 2019). For example, accounting and assumptions built into economic models fail to address for issues of fairness, scoping and rebound effects. Fairness relates to expanding consumption footprints of the world's wealthy and growing middle class and the needs of 'developing' countries who have not had the opportunities as Annex I countries.[4] Scoping refers to offshoring production and emissions to other countries or accounting for embodied emissions in the country of consumption. The rebound effect (Jevons Paradox) involves the growing emissions and environmental footprint that comes with improved resource efficiency and productivity (for detailed counter–arguments to these counter–arguments see Stoknes and Rockström 2019).

Global engagement on the sustainable development agenda[5] and uptake of ecological modernisation discourse demonstrates that these broad and complex issues are being recognised outside of traditional social and environmental justice institutions. "Now even those mainstream economists who engage in debate on the environment find

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[4]United Nation Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) classification for the 'developed', 'wealthy' and industrialised countries that have or are transitioning to a market economy. I use scare quotes to indicate that these terms (also poor countries, third world, global south, less developed) are socially constructed and inadequate in their conception of duality and hierarchy between states.
[5] The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all United Nation Member States in 2015 "provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future". According to their website the 17 goals "are the world's best plan to build a better world for people and our planet by 2030" (United Nations n.d.).

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themselves adopting the rhetoric of an ecologically sensitive approach. Despite their efforts to reach orthodox conclusions, their very language reflects how they are forced to recognise and cope with the new problems of economics in an ecological context" (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994, 199). Some even a welcome the challenge for innovative minds and marketers to find opportunities and win-wins.

It is questionable whether growth-based proposals enable or indeed reflect truly sustainable (intra and intergenerationally just, inclusive, and environmentally regenerative) outcomes. It has been argued that *climate capitalism* is merely another opportunity to extract value and create new markets in the name of limitless economic growth which is fundamentally at odds with the climate, environment and welfare as an economic advantage for some means domination over others (Hueting 2010; Klein 2014; Pettenger 2016). Sandberg, Klockars, and Wilén (2019) find that green growth has in practice been unable to reconcile normative ideals of environmental preservation with economic growth and that it has favoured the latter. Furthermore, growth speak is seen by heterodoxical perspectives to have co-opted and diluted the potential to achieve sustainability in the broadest and most profound sense (Alaimo 2012; Kirby and O'Mahony 2018). Some cynical that *green* and *sustainable growth* signifiers are used as a rhetorical tactic to legitimise growth-oriented policies (Glasson 2015; Luks 1998, 147). For example, the term *ecologically sustainable* has been morphed over the years, into *sustainable development,* then to the *development goals* and *sustainable growth* to *sustaining growth*.

Despite these critiques, the greening of economic growth is the hegemonic discourse on matters of sustainable development and European climate policy. A discourse (the bundles of shared meanings, actions, identities, norms, values and more) is considered hegemonic once it becomes institutionalised, to some degree. In other words, it achieves discursive domination once theoretical concepts are reflected in policy and institutional arrangements (Hajer 1995, 61).

Heterodox communities — green political economy discourse coalitions

Counter to the hegemonic pro-growth paradigm and sceptical of the green or selective growth discourse is a community of heterodox discourses — many of which entail a shift in paradigm to bring about genuine sustainability, justice and a radical

reorganisation of society (Audet 2016, Escobar 2015; Feola and Jaworska 2018). In other words, a great transformation of civilisation. Heterodox discourses, for example, the *limits to growth* and *transition discourse*, are rarely reflected in policy (Khmara and Kronenberg 2020). However, their proponents offer solutions such as communing, circular economy, prosperity and well-being economics, and experimental initiatives such as alternative food and eco-housing movements (Charonis 2012).

Degrowth shares concerns and ideas with similar new and old concepts that go by other names and other social and environmental movements. It draws from theoretical critiques such as Steady-State Economics introduced by Herman Daly in 1973 and Marxist critiques of capitalist accumulation. Guillen-Royo (2015) captures the nuance of degrowth in relation to other transition discourses as follows:

> Both Steady-State and degrowth approaches entail a transformation of society through state intervention based on the generation of suitable technical, organisational and economic conditions for a low impact economy. However, they differ in the stress placed on the need to involve grassroots movements and local organisations in the process of transformation. The degrowth movement underscores the great transformative power of fostering coalitions of experts, policy-makers and grassroots social movements or local and personal initiatives aiming at downshifting and low carbon lifestyles. (2015, 26)

The virtue of the fact that so many different movements and proposals exist indicates that there is no single, or agreed-upon vision for a sustainable and low-carbon transition (Feola and Jaworska 2018; Stevenson 2019). Here, Hajer's (1995) concept of *discourse coalitions* is useful for describing when actors or groups of actors "sing in chorus - but not necessarily in the same choir" (Szarka 2004, 319). A discourse coalition is defined as "the ensemble of a set of story lines, the actors that utter these story lines, and the practices in which this discursive activity is based" (Hajer 1995, 65). Advocacy coalitions (a subset of discourse coalitions) aid us to view discourse as a means of political action for actors who are proponents of green political and green economic thought (Szarka 2004). However, this thesis will demonstrate (in Chapter 5) that the storylines and frames evoked by the term degrowth are highly contested among its coalitions.

In this thesis, I conceptualise degrowth within a community of heterodox discourse coalitions. Most pertinent for consideration in this thesis are discourses framed in terms of growth (even if antithetical to it). They are marked by the prefixes such as *no*,

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slow, *a-* (agnostic), and *post-* growth. Although similar and marginal compared to the Goliathan pursuit of economic growth, these emerging ideas have nuanced differences. The difference between post and degrowth Muraca (2013) clarifies that "Technically, degrowth refers more to a *process* and post-growth to a *state*. However, depending on the respective understanding of the necessary steps to exit the logic of growth, the two terminologies often do not diverge significantly" (148. Emphasis added).

To be clear, the debate between green growth and its critics is not merely a question of the impact economic growth has on a low-carbon transition. Indeed, degrowth is concerned with *oikonomos* — how we manage our common home (green economy discourse).[6] However, agents also consider how societies might govern in relation to and not separate from the environment (green political discourse).[7] Degrowth can be conceived of as a type of green political economy discourse (Stevenson 2019). In addition, it is fitting to call degrowth a transition discourse. The movement argues that a transition from growth to post-growth paradigm must entail a personal and cultural shift of consciousness in order to be a profoundly sustainable process of societal transformation (Feola and Jaworska 2018).

2.2 Degrowth movement as discourse — the sum of its parts

Let me first defend the reason for the following broad description of degrowth as a political project, social movement and intellectual paradigm. The controversial yet fertile contribution of degrowth to the post-growth imaginary caught my attention for its bold attempt to reimagine society. Some scholars choose to focus on only one or two of these sources. However, when considering degrowth as a for socio-economic transformation, it is improper to neglect the variety of discursive practices and social, political and social structures that form its collective action (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Something would be lost if one was to only focus on one or some of its sources and strategies. "Degrowth only makes sense when [all] its sources are taken into account, meaning not just ecology and bioeconomics, but also the meaning of life and well-

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[6] See Khmara and Kronenberg (2020) for description a of the types of green economy discourses which include pro-growth, green or selective growth, and limits and transformation.
[7] See Dryzek (2013) for an overview of political environmental discourses, specifically the limits to growth, green growth and green radicalism discourses which are most relevant to this thesis.

being, anti-utilitarianism, justice and democracy. Taken independently, they can lead to incomplete and reductionist projects fundamentally incompatible with the ideas of the degrowth movement" (Demaria et al. 2013, 206).

Moreover, the possibility of a degrowth paradigm shift entails multiple prerequisites and numerous actors as agents of change. Buch-Hansen (2018) identifies four conditions for a degrowth paradigm shift: A deep crisis in the existing paradigm and system; a coherent alternative political project; a comprehensive coalition of social forces; and consent from the population. The latter two conditions, and to an extent the second, are missing. As such, to answer how the degrowth discourse contributes to the movement's marginality is necessary to conceptualise it as the sum of its parts — all of its sources.

The movement's discourse derives from all of these parts, each containing various arenas, actors and audiences. Degrowth advocates are "signalling agents" who produce meanings that are alternative and contentious to those defended by the mainstream hegemonic discourses (Demaria et al. 2013, 193). Actors include academic scholars, grassroots activists and practitioners of alternative lifestyles predominantly from wealthy countries in the global North, coalescing in local and international formal and informal settings (Weiss and Cattaneo 2017).

Intellectual Paradigm

Demaria et al. (2013) dub degrowth an "activist-led science". The word degrowth was first used in English at the International Degrowth Conference in 2008 in Paris where the movement has its intellectual roots. The word originates from the francophone *Décroissance* which was popularised through French political activism in the 1990s. *La décroissance économique socialement soutenable* or "Socially sustainable economic degrowth" spread among activist circles to Italy and Spain and has evolved as a social movement to include an academic paradigm in combination with the limits to growth thinking of ecological economics (Kirby and O'Mahony 2018, 239; Martínez-Alier et al. 2010; Weiss and Cattaneo 2017).[8]

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[8] For a comprehensive overview of academic degrowth paradigm, see Weis and Cattaneo (2017) and Martinez-Alier et al. (2010) for their review of sources, interpretations and implications of sustainable degrowth.

Degrowth, as a niche of ecological economics, also adopts (or aims to adopt) the principles of Post-Normal Science (PNS) — an extension of a post-modernist perspective. "We call it 'post-normal' as a reminder of the contrast with the 'puzzle-solving within a (dogmatic) paradigm' of the 'normal science' articulated by Thomas Kuhn" (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994, 204). In the face of high stakes issues and decision making paired with complexity and uncertainty, normal sciences are argued to be inadequate. PNS scholars accept that no absolute truths exist or can be discovered, as such they do, in theory, also acknowledge that the plurality of legitimate perspectives on a social or policy issue needs to be considered. Instead of the pursuit of 'truth', PNS aims at problem-solving through plurality and quality (rather than rationality and predictability). PNS scholars aim to find shared and operational solutions to complex and significant issues — much like applied sciences or professional consultancy do in the fields of engineering or medicine (D'Alisa and Kallis 2014; Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994).

What this means is that environmental economists and degrowth scholars are "boundary workers" active in policy arenas and in the advocacy of solutions to social and environmental problems which are high stakes and entail system uncertainty (Wesselink and Hoppe 2011, 406). Degrowth scholars have a role to play in constructing the discourse and through their intellectual advocacy have a responsibility for creating and disseminating new imaginaries. Which, for example, editors D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis (2014) attempt to do in *Degrowth: A vocabulary for a new era*.[9] As such, the intellectual advocacy of degrowth proponents and their peers are interesting subjects for discourse analysis.

Social movement

In addition to its conceptual roots in ecological economics and limits to growth scholarship degrowth is commonly described, at least in part, as a social movement (Demaria et al. 2013; Martínez-Alier et al. 2010; Muraca 2013; Rodríguez-Labajos et al. 2019). As with any movement and academic community, there is a range of groups and perspectives within the degrowth movement. It is appropriate to conceive of the movement as a spectrum. "Speaking of a 'spectrum' allows for much broader variation

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[9] A book that provides an overview of the degrowth concept and its principles, though it is light on self-critique. It is also made available as an audiobook and podcast in several languages through a collaborative project https://degrowthaudiobook.wordpress.com/english/.

of degrees of involvement with degrowth — not necessarily as a discourse or idea in the narrow sense, but as a loosely bounded space of practices with a broadly similar orientation" (Eversberg and Schmelzer 2018, 250).

When understood as a spectrum of collective action, including activism, academic scholarship, and alternative lifestyle practices, degrowth fits the broad conceptualisation of new social movements as it entails lifestyle and contentious politics aspects of a social movement (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012). Social movements ought not only to be defined by *contentious politics* aspects of "organised change-oriented collective action aimed at the state or other authority structures" (1). Degrowth most certainly includes these types of groups. It can also be considered a *lifestyle movement* as it includes "loosely bound collectivities in which participants advocate lifestyle change as a primary means to social change, politicising daily life while pursuing morally coherent 'authentic' identities" (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012, 15). For example, degrowth proponents experiment with practices such as retrofitting and repair alongside meaningful lifestyles and work that does not contribute to inordinate environmental degradation, inequality and misery (Demaria et al. 2013; Kallis 2017). I invite my reader also to consider the great variety of degrowth-compatible localised projects, books, research and advocacy that challenge the growth fetish or propose a transition to alternative ways of organising a low-carbon, ecocentric society (Audet 2016; Feola and Jaworska 2018; Kirby and O'Mahony 2018). For example, transition town groups, ecovillages, eco-socialism some environmental groups and some low-carbon projects and policy.

In a survey of participants at the 2014 degrowth conference, Eversberg and Schmelzer (2018) make out five conflicting and distinct currents along the spectrum. They are the "eco-radical sufficiency-orientated critics of civilisation"; "pragmatic reformists"; "weakly politicised voluntarist-pacifist idealists"; "socialist rationalist-modernist Left"; and an "activist alternative practical Left". These groups favour different forms of mediation and collective action. Most common is the "'heterotopian' lived critique as the motor of self-transformation". Less common are the separatist currents that choose to live in alternative lifestyle communities and the theory-driven approaches that critique traditional practice (266). In contrast to the openly anti-capitalist strands, there is a small yet notable conservative group of degrowth which does not share the emancipatory tenets of the other sub currents. Dengler and Seebacher (2019) note that

such a patriarchal and nationalist understanding risks inviting a populist right-wing turn.

Activist Slogan

Demaria et al. (2013) offer many more descriptors for degrowth that depict degrowth as a slogan and rallying cry for systemic change: A criticism of ecological modernisation; a challenger for green growth, western development and the good life; a response to dissidence of the current world and a search for a better alternative; a culture disentangled from economic representations; and, a rediscovery of identity. As such, they find that degrowth has a highly utopian dimension as it seeks to not only critique but also identify solutions and alternative social patterns. Degrowth is "it advocates instead for a fundamental change of key references such as the collective imagination (*changement d'imaginaire*)" (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1742). Understood as an activist slogan degrowth has excellent potential as a storyline for socio-economic transformation. Interpretive storylines set "a specific train of thought into motion, communicating why an issue might be a problem, who or what might be responsible for it, and what should be done about it" (Nisbet 2009, 3).

However, the word degrowth is highly debated among affinity groups — "a vocabulary for a new era" or perhaps a "'missile word' that backfires" (Drews and Antal 2016). Degrowth is criticised for being vague and ambiguous. Van den Bergh (2011) critiques degrowth on many fronts and challenges degrowthers to "strive for greater coherence". In rebuttal to this, Kallis (2011, 873) argues that "some degree of ambiguity is common in many normative social science concepts without compromising their usefulness."

Drews and Antal (2016) summarise that many degrowthers believe that this "missile word" will help to break the automatic association of growth with 'better' and that the term degrowth can never be co-opted by the mainstream. However, they argue that degrowth uses a metaphor of downward momentum, which is almost always associated as bad. Moreover, the term evokes a growth frame and thus strengthens it while also evoking other undesirable frames associated with economic recessions. They suggest other more favourable messaging that removes the growth framing and evokes more positive values such as prosperity and well-being. I will argue, from my

analysis of empirical material, (including the advocacy of Kallis and van den Bergh), that I tend to agree by add that there are necessarily nuances to explore.

It is difficult to succinctly and compellingly tell the degrowth story. Thickening heterodox narratives for transition is not a simple task. However, the success of any sustainable transition movement is contingent in part on discourse. Though the limits to growth is not a new concept, degrowth has not yet found a compelling narrative to transport its radically different imagining of a post-growth future.

Political project

In addition to being an intellectual paradigm and social movement, it can be argued that degrowth can also be considered a political project — though it does not yet have any political representation, party platforms or mechanisms to put forward policy. A core element of a degrowth transition is democracy (Demaria et al. 2013). Simply put by Schneider, Kallis, and Martinez-Alier (2010, 516), it is "a democratic collective decision, a project with the ambition of voluntarily getting us closer to ecological sustainability and socio-environmental justice worldwide". However, the movement is not unified regarding what democratic processes are necessary for a voluntary yet global transition toward ecological sustainability and justice. Some proponents defend the current democratic process (reformists); others propose an alternative participatory democracy (Eversberg and Schmelzer 2018). Less common but notably still is an authoritarian current on the fringes of degrowth (Dengler and Seebacher 2019).

I argue that degrowth is a *prophetic discourse* that draws attention to what societies should be uncomfortable about and want to change to suggest alternatives for what society might become (Kamminga 2008, 288). Buch-Hansen's (2018, 160) analysis finds that degrowth proponents present a number of practical ideas and policy options that are reasonably coherent and address many of the crisis faced locally and globally. For example, degrowth and its heterodox community champion policy options such as work-sharing, minimum and maximum income, localised production, and job guarantees. These policy ideas are often only theoretically supported or trailed on small localised scales — one cannot know if they would make viable a political platform (Bollier and Conaty 2014).

Based on findings from a workshop on social movement alignment strategies, Bollier and Conaty (2014) comment that it is difficult for these social movements to peruse both practical and pragmatic policy goals and also try to change political or institutional discourse. They suggest that degrowth's radical discourse may be better suited to the latter. Their conclusions I agree are conceivable, considering that degrowth is a particularly unconventional and anti-capitalist political project that is unlikely to be supported by the leading capital fraction or their allies (Buch-Hansen 2018). From my empirical observations will argue that to gain political traction and achieve a degrowth paradigm shift, heterodox agents must form strategic alliances with each other.

Critical comments

Degrowth is by no means free of criticism. There are not only economic and methodological arguments made to counter degrowth. They are also a growing number of critiques of the movement and its discourse, made by heterodox actors and groups, that range from sympathetic to hostile (Brownhill, Turner, and Kaara 2012; Dengler and Seebacher 2019; Drews and Antal 2016; Ferguson 2015; Rodríguez-Labajos et al. 2019). In later chapters, I will relate critiques from the literature and add my own to the empirical material.

Codetta

I have, thus far, only scratched the surface of a long-running critique of the pursuit of infinite economic growth which green growth has inherited. Degrowth presents an alternative paradigm that, while still niche, is supported by a growing community of scholarship and citizenry. The degrowth movement is a spectrum and entails a multiplicity of ideas, actors and arenas. The movement entails a political project that is still under development. It is an intellectual paradigm emerging from ecological economics and growing to include a transdisciplinary community of academic scholars. Furthermore, it is a social movement with a European origin that now has some international reach. It includes strands ranging from radical activists to policy reformists to alternative lifestyle practitioners (Eversberg and Schmelzer 2018). The movement exists within a constellation of coalition discourses that share some, but not all, of the same concerns and strategies for a radical transformation of civilisation.

To observe the degrowth discourse and better understand the marginality of the movement, I will next present my theoretical framework and analytical tools explore how the debates and discussions unfold between degrowth actors and various pro and post-growth figures and what effect this has on the degrowth discourse. I will not engage in a debate on economic modelling or methods which already consumes much of the green political economy scholarship and actors in the texts chosen for analysis. Instead, I aim to diagnose (to borrow a metaphor from ecological economists) framing incongruences in the degrowth discourse and suggest how they contribute to the marginality of the movement — a prognosis if you will.

The following cautionary remark aptly concludes the background and literature on the degrowth debate:

> The concept of growth is in itself vague and polymorphic, thus bringing such ambiguity to the term 'degrowth.' Unravelling the notion of growth in complex coupled ecological-economic systems should be a priority for enabling a fruitful dialogue towards enriching the sustainable degrowth idea. Otherwise, sustainable de-growth will not go beyond becoming a new 'antifetish', becoming a fetish in itself nonetheless. (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1745)

This introduces three connected themes that will be explored in later analytical and discussion chapters. First, the issue of degrowth being negatively framed and framed in terms of growth. Second, the unravelling or unlearning particular language and norms to overcome the constraining influence of discourse which lead to the reproduction of hegemonic and colonial discourses and systems by degrowth actors in their academic scholarship and activism. Third, avoiding from becoming fetishised — as either a niche group closed off to alliances; co-opted by the interests some interests over others; or doctrinaire in favour of maintaining ideological and discourse purity.

3   Theoretical framework

He who does not study rhetoric will be a victim of it

— found on a Greek wall from the 6th Century B.C.

In this chapter, I turn to discourse. The study of social movements and discourse can both be placed in the interpretive or social constructionist traditions of the social sciences (Benford 1997; Hajer and Versteeg 2005). As such, I position myself among and share interests with various frameworks (social constructionism, constructivism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism) concerned with how language shapes experience (Wigginton and Lafrance 2019, 9). Accordingly, this thesis assumes the existence of multiple, socially constructed realities and takes a critical stance on the pursuit of one single 'truth' (Hajer and Versteeg 2005, 176). Discourse theory covers vast territory and has a multiplicity of applications across varying disciplines that have turned to language. So, to proceed with this chapter, it is first essential to define the theoretical concepts upon which this thesis conceptually hangs. Secondly, I will argue that the degrowth movement should not underestimate the importance of language. The study and appreciation of discourse should be taken seriously as it offers an alternative tool for convincing people of the shortcomings of unlimited growth and moving them to action. Intellectual advocates (of degrowth) can only go so far with their standard tools of "rational" argumentation, facts and economic or climate modelling (McCalman and Connelly 2019; Deirdre N. McCloskey 1998). Thirdly, as my thesis is interdisciplinary, I will endeavour to situate my work in the theoretical landscape and relevant literature, noting and addressing the relevant tensions that exist. I will introduce or elaborate on theoretical and analytical concepts relevant to my analysis of degrowth, namely social movement framing and collective identity.

3.1   Through the lens of discourse

3.1.1   Defining discourse — clarifying concepts

To embark on a discourse analysis of the degrowth debate warrants clarification of the term *discourse* as the definition one chooses has implications for how one conducts a discourse analysis (Stevenson 2019). I will blend two definitions. John Dryzek (2013) provides a definition that is useful to study degrowth advocacy. His definition of

discourse pays attention to how environmental problems are made sense of through shared values and ideas:

> A discourse is a shared way of apprehending the world. Embedded in language, it enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories and accounts. Discourses construct meanings and relationships, helping them define common sense and legitimate knowledge. Each discourse rests on assumptions, judgments and contentions that provide the basic terms for analysis, debates, agreements and disagreements. (2013, 9-10)

Maarten Hajer (1995) provides the concept of discourse coalitions and focuses on the social practices and power structures that (re)produce discourse. He defines discourse as "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorisations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities" (44).
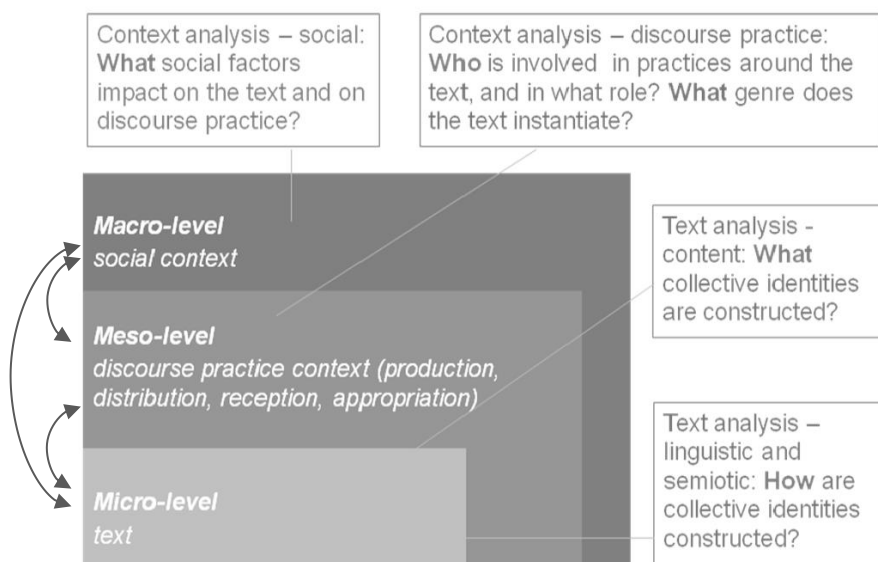
Figure 1. Levels of analysing collective identity in discourse, adapted from Koller (2012, 24).

For analytical purposes, discourse can be examined on three levels. For example, written or oral texts and conversations which happen every day are often referred to as micro-level and meso-levels of discourse (Koller 2012, see Figure 1). Hajer (1995, 44) calls this "modes of talk", and Gee (2011, 34) refers to "small d" discourse otherwise "language-in-use or stretches of language". "Big D discourse" is then the modes of talk *plus* a *who* and a *what* — the identities practising or uttering language, which are situated in a social and historical context (macro-level). Taken together then, discourse can be understood as what is being said by whom (and where and why). It reveals a

particular way of representing the world by thinking, valuing, acting and interacting in the 'right' places and at the 'right' times with the 'right' objects (Fairclough 2003, 26; Gee 2011, 34). For clarity and practical purposes when referring to specific stretches of language (small d discourse), I refer to utterances and texts and discourse for big D discourses at the macro-level such as the degrowth discourse and its coalition discours*es* of transition or green political economy.

3.2 Turning to language — why study the intellectual advocacy of degrowthers

Transition narratives, such as degrowth, are not yet popular (Audet 2016). To understand why I will critically study part of the movement's discourse — specifically the argumentation of the movement's intellectual advocates. This thesis takes its point of departure that language matters and how we construct, interpret, discuss and analyse social and environmental problems have a myriad of consequences (Dryzek 2013, 7). To justify my reasoning for taking the language turn to study degrowth, I will retrace the argument that inspired Luks (1998), among others to argue, for ecological economists to be more self-aware of their rhetoric (McCloskey 1998; Bruner and Oelschlaeger 1994).

More than 20 years ago, Luks (1998) argued that in order to *change* the field of economics, the sub-field of ecological economics (on which degrowth is based) required more "rhetorical self-awareness." Deirdre McCloskey has been fundamental in bringing the concept of "rhetorical awareness" to the field of economics.[10] Her work "has attempted to persuade economists that economics is rhetorical persuasion" (Mäki 1995, 1300). The same is arguably true for the degrowth movement and any type of science or economics, political discourse hegemonic or marginal; "our theorising is fundamentally shaped by our social and natural environment" (Luks 1998, 142). Although "the very notion of rhetoric has been, and continues to be, an ambiguous and contestable concept" McCloskey has been praised for capturing the pluralisms within rhetoric (Mäki 1995, 1301). To her, rhetoric is both "the art of argument" and "a literary way of examining conversation" (McCloskey 1998, 256). From Mäki's

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[10] Deirdre N. McCloskey began her career as Donald N. McCloskey. I will refer to her and her work with female pronouns regardless of the name she published under.

synthesis of McCloskey's rich conception of rhetoric in economics, Luks (1998) provides the following definition which I too shall use: "the social process which involves a persuader, a persuadee, the intention of persuasion, arguments, conversation (and the study there of)" (140).[11]

Klamer (1983) agrees with McCloskey that for economists "The persuasiveness of their argument is critical, whether their argument persuades is often *not* a matter of evidence or logic" (x). McCloskey argues that what matters most in scientific (and economic) discourse is rhetoric — literary thinking and making a good argument. She goes as far as claiming that scientific discourse is not good or bad because of methodology, but because it makes a sincere attempt to contribute to the conversations of humanity (McCloskey 1998). By this, her critics fear she means that methodology is of no importance at all. However, she is not arguing that careful analysis and rigorous science or mathematics should be abandoned in favour of sweet words. Rather methodology, in economics and science, *is* rhetoric. — it is a performance of shared, socially situated identities and meanings.

In an attempt to expand the ecological economics discourse to include consideration of rhetoric, Luks (1998) drew from McCloskey's argument to argue that the critical study of rhetoric would increase the impact of the field and be in keeping with the ecological economics principles of PNS. However, he noted that through its establishing years, ecological economics actors did not pay attention to language or take the role of "good conversation" seriously compared to the dedication made to the methodology.[12] Much like my own epistemological positioning, PNS scholars accept that no absolute truth(s) exist or can be discovered. As such, they (in principle), also acknowledge the plurality of legitimate perspectives on a social or policy issue needs to be considered. For this reason, the study of language and argumentation, in addition to contributions of other disciplines, can be used to understand better the construction of environmental and social issues (Luks 1998).

Is the role of language still taken for granted in the scholarship of ecological economics and its related fields? Plumecocq's (2014) analysis of ecological economics discourse

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[11] I use rhetoric not as an analytical or theoretical concept but as term within discourse analysis.
[12] Bruner and Oelschlaeger (1994) made the same observation of ecophilosophy and the field's resistance to take rhetoric.

finds perhaps yes. It has actually become more similar to environmental economic discourse.[13] He suggests niches' in ecological economics, such as degrowth, are promising but need to consider the social, organisational and lock-ins that impede the transformation they propose. Thus, in this thesis, I re-examine Luks' suggestion that ecological economists (and by extension degrowth scholars) become more self-aware of discourse.

It is necessary to be aware of and appreciate the role of discourse (as a transporter of shared meanings, identities, values and so on). However, I do not claim that it *alone* will be sufficient to shift from a growth paradigm to post-growth one. "Rhetoric is *one important factor* for the political success of theories. […] Theory, policy and language are closely intertwined. Being rhetorically aware can help in this context" (Luks 1998, 146–147, emphasis added). Nor, for that matter, do I presume that it is an *explicit* goal of degrowth to become a hegemonic discourse (to be further explored in the analytical chapters). Seeking hegemony is ideological work that entails universalising particular meanings, aims, interests and values of a group in order to achieve or maintain dominance (Fairclough 2003, 58; van Dijk 1993, 258). Instead, I presume and will argue that a coalition of counter–discourses, acting in resistance to the hegemon is one prerequisite for a paradigm shift (Buch-Hansen 2018) and that it is a creative struggle to develop and thicken counter–narratives.

Thus, I find it is important and necessary to analyse discourse and argumentation to how degrowth advocates narrate their version of a sustainable transition. Not only is this line of enquiry useful for researchers such as myself, but also for degrowth scholars and intellectual advocates of the movement. Many of them are also ecological economists and make use of scientific and economic rhetoric to support their advocacy for a degrowth transition.

3.3   From a theoretical to an analytical framework

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[13] Note that environmental economics and ecological economics do not share normative foundations. The latter is often regarded as a post-normal science (Luks 1998; Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994). Yet ecological economics has been found to be coevolving towards the former's neo-classical economic arguments of ecosystem services and monetary valuation (Plumecocq 2014).

There are numerous theoretical approaches to discourse analysis and long-running debates among discourse analysts, one of which can be distilled into an ontological question: Does language reflect reality, or does it construct reality, what a subject knows and experiences? In this thesis, I adopt the latter view. "The basic assumption of discourse analysis is that language profoundly shapes one's views of the world and reality, instead of being only a neutral medium mirroring it" (Hajer and Versteeg 2005, 176). Thus, discourse is a social construct — more than just signs and systems of language but meanings and interpretations of reality that are negotiated and contested for in the social realm. Discourse, in turn, contributes to shaping reality through the process of framing and institutionalisation, perhaps even to the extent that individuals are constrained by social structures and social practices that materialise in discourse and text (Audet 2016; Fairclough 2003; Hajer 1995; Hook 2007). Language is undeniably part of social life, and so social research ought to take account of language. That is not to say that discourse is everything or that other social theorisings that pay little attention to text are misguided — discourse analysis is just one resource for social research.

3.3.1   Discourse as a coordinator of collective action

Through discourse analysis, the embeddedness of language in the practices of movements can be observed — specifically collective action, identity and advocacy of its actors (Hajer and Versteeg 2005, 56). Discourses coordinate social action of groups of people and organisations that may not explicitly interact with each other (Dryzek 2013). Consider, for example, scholars in Spain and political activists in France and ecovillage members in Australia all acting under the name of degrowth. Discourse is of particular importance in movements that lack formal sources of coordination, such as institutions and movement organisations (10).

Social movement scholars have found collective identity a useful concept to address gaps in understanding collective action and political processes. For example, why and how people become mobilised, how they are perceived and how cultural representations, social norms and institutions transform (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Moreover, in the absence of formal institutions and organisations (as is the case of the degrowth movement) collective meaning-making and identity building are essential features of social movements and the discursive analysis of them (291).

As I have described, degrowth is regarded as a movement with multiple strands within it and discourse coalitions adjacent to it — it is not as unified as one (or at least I) initially might expect. However, actors need not share one collective identity for the concept to be applied to help bridge gaps in our understanding of degrowth (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Social movements should not be assumed to be unified empirical projects (Melucci 1995, 55). Good research allows for a variety of relationships been discursive practices and social, political and social structures (Polletta and Jasper 2001). As such, I have made the conceptual starting point for my research broad to observe and contextualise degrowth actors as the carriers of discourses among strands within the movement and coalitions with other transition movements

Social movements, such as degrowth, should not be considered homogenous or unified, nor should they be considered static and unchanging (Melucci 1995, 53). Actors should be acknowledged for carrying out many social roles — including that of orators and storytellers. They have their own internal tensions as activists, researchers, family members, volunteers (Johnston 1995). While a discourse can coordinate social action, it should not be assumed to be coherent (Dryzek 2013). Environmental discourse is not homogenous. There are contradictions within environmental discourse — green growth and sustainable development are not compatible with ecocentrism or green radical discourse (Dryzek 2013). Within economic discourse, there is also plurality. For example, various schools of economics (neoclassical, Marxist, Keynesian, feminist, ecological, etc.) may use similar rhetorical techniques and enact a certain identity, but they assume very different normative stances and reach different conclusions (Klamer 1983).

Melucci (1995) finds that collective identity is not only a thing to be studied but also an analytical tool that can help describe the multiplicity underlying the apparent unity of a social movement that is an empirical starting point (54). By his definition, collective identity is an analytical lens through which to help observe and understand texts as sources of discourse. Collective identity is both an outcome and a process of social movement participation which gives individuals a sense of belonging and meaning — stirring people to action and cultivating solidarity among fellows. Collective identity is a perceived connection and relationship to a group — "a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly…" (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285). It is expressed through

cultural resources such as discourse, names, narrative, rituals and so on (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 284). Succinctly put, "Collective identities are theorised as conceptual structures comprising beliefs and knowledge, norms and values, attitudes and expectations as well as emotions, and as being reinforced and negotiated in discourse" (Koller 2012, 1).

Individual identity formation is a constant reflexive revision of one's self-definition — it is about how one is different from others but also how one associates with other ideas and groups (Saunders 2008). When applied to collectives of individuals, the same applies. A shared identity has a role in defining what a group or movement stands for and establishing boundaries against other groups (Jasper and McGarry 2015, 1; Saunders 2008).

Regarding the latter point on boundaries, collective identity is a relational concept and cannot be separated from the actors outside the group — those they are trying to be distinguished from and recognised by simultaneously. Collective identity's utility as an analytical concept rests on the ability of a movement to locate its self within a system of relationships (Melucci 1995, 47). Collective identity is a useful concept to apply to the degrowth movement and the various sub-currents and groups of actors within it. Furthermore, it is useful for relating the movement to the community of heterodox coalition movements and discourses, such as actors who advocate for and defend steady-state and ecological economics, post-growth and a-growth. Finally, it useful to relate actors that are proponents of degrowth with social agents that defend the nemesis green pro-growth paradigm. In sum, collective identity as an analytical concept leads us to ask questions about the kinds of conflicts, tensions and negotiations are observable in the process of constructing and maintaining a movement as a unified empirical actor (Melucci 1995, 249)?

3.3.2   What is so critical about discourse analyses?

Discourse theory lends itself towards critical forms of analysis (van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 2003). Several theorists posit that all discourse analysis is critical, because "all language is political and all language is part of the way we build and sustain our world, cultures, and institutions" (van Dijk 1993, Fairclough 2003; Gee 2011, 10). Foucault's work notably demonstrates that discursive power struggles can be traced

through discursive practices and the interaction of discourses that underlie not just politics but all social and environmental issues. We can study institutions through which knowledge systems (i.e. discourses) are disseminated and legitimised. However, he offers us little to understand the role of the discoursing subject nor does he offer any normative guidance on what social actors should or could do with discourse (Hajer 1995; Hajer and Versteeg 2005, 181). These matters are pertinent to this thesis and therefore require further discussion.

CDA can go further than descriptive endeavours to offer explanations and even speak to or intervene in social and political issues (Gee 2011, 9). However, just because scholarship can be critical does not mean that scholars offer any interventions to solve the issues unveiled or that their advice is applied in practice. For example, McCloskey is criticised for not going far enough with the critical potential for rhetorical analysis in economics (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994; Luks 1998; Stettler 1995). She did not critique the ideology of the traditional economic schools of thought she worked within but rather argued that if scholars where more self-aware of their rhetoric, they could strengthen the field. So, there is some irony in that a wave of ecophilosophers and ecological economists are using McCloskey's argument for rhetorical self-awareness to challenge the hegemonic discourses and advance the marginal ones. Luks (1998) summarises this line of criticism to say that the content and assumptions of mainstream economics are normative and defend conservative and neoclassical beliefs shaped by the human actors that have developed it. The claim of economic objectivity is misleading and disguises the vast ideological and personal differences between economists. One only needs to listen to the commitment and passion of arguments (on both sides of the sustainable growth debate) and notice the different economic tools they favour to see that (McCloskey 1983).

Nonetheless, "A critical rhetoric, such as McCloskey's, exposes the poverty of imagination inherent in reducing environmental issues to economic questions" (Bruner and Oelschlaeger 1994, 391). Similarly, with a critical approach to discourse, one can consider who has the power to set the terms of debate, establish what is possible and what is not. More so, with self-awareness, one may recognise how one's discourse might be problematic; representative of some social worlds but not others and therefore beneficial to only certain groups of people. "An honest recognition of conflicting interests and of power relationships will protect such negotiations from becoming a

covert co-optation by one side" (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994, 204). Thus, in this thesis, I will argue that there is a need for degrowth proponents to become more critically aware of their discourse.

CDA is "unabashedly normative: any critique by definition presupposes an applied ethics" (van Dijk 1993, 253). This thesis will go further than to argue that with self-awareness of discourse, post- and degrowth proponents might be better equipped to conjure new imaginaries and vocabulary that have potential to *transform* political and environmental discourse towards a post-growth paradigm shift. Critical awareness is necessary to *advance* degrowth. That is, to become a more emancipatory political project, just movement and pluralist academic endeavour. Such reflexiveness on the part of change agents can aid in trailing alternative ways of speaking and advocating to make a more compelling and widely accepted case for societal transformation. All the while, being aware of the risk of co-option in the processes of impacting mainstream policy, politics and lifestyles. However, even with self-awareness actors face a challenge when arguing from their marginalised position against more dominant discourses and the Goliathan growth paradigm. Next, it must be addressed how discourses change, if at all?

3.3.3   Addressing the structure-agency debate

The sheer diversity and variety of environmental discourses illustrate that discourses can adapt and change (Dryzek 2013). It should by now, be clear that I assume that individuals can, to a degree, have agency and creativity to wield the enabling qualities of discourse. Without agency, actors in social movements have no hope of crafting compelling stories to make way for new imaginaries to become less marginal. However, my assumption is not shared by other analysts, so in this section, I will address the structure-agency tension in discourse theory and state my position.

Discourse analysis has been highly influenced by the (constructivist) work of Foucault who saw that discourse "is itself a part of reality, and constitutes the discoursing subject" and therefore cannot be manipulated by the individual (Hajer 1996, 51). However, Fairclough (who identifies as a realist), in what is typically seen as a constructivist tradition, accepts that while discursive practices shape both objects and subjects, these practices are themselves constrained by the material reality of

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reconstituted subjects and objects (Fairclough 2003; 1993, 60). Here-in lies a tension within social theorising and this thesis — the structure-agency bipolarity. Are social actors rational and agentive in the process of thinking and expressing through language and thereby constructing discourse? Or are social actors constrained by discourses to the extent that discursive practices regulate the ideas expressed by individuals and groups?

To make sense of this tension, I take an argumentative turn. Hajer (1995) and Billig (1995) both take an argumentative approach that intersects nicely for this thesis and includes analytical concepts of discourse coalitions and discourse storylines which are useful for observing social movements. In Hajer's discourse analysis of ecological modernisation and the policy process (also the subtitle of his book), he attributes some agency to the discoursing subject. He acknowledges the duality of structure as "social action originates in human agency of clever, creative human beings but in a context of social structures of various sorts that both enable and constrain their agency. The transformational model of social reality then maintains that society is reproduced in this process of interaction between agents and structures that constantly adjusts, transforms, resists or reinvents social arrangements" (58). In other words, actors can only draw from the discourses available to them to make sense of the world. Nevertheless, they do so actively and creatively by selecting and arranging and adapting their argument in a struggle of language, meaning and identity. Regarding social movements, such as degrowth, Billig (1995) sees that "the ideology of a social movement are affected by some of the same dilemmatic and paradoxical aspects of rhetoric that affect individual speakers." The paradox of creativity (agency) and repetition (structure) is that though they are in tension, they mutually reinforce each other. Thus, although discourses, particularly hegemonic ones, are powerful, they are not impenetrable (Dryzek 2013, 22).

3.3.4   Methodological considerations for analysis

There are methodological repercussions for an argumentative approach to discourse analysis. These will be discussed in Chapter 4.1.2 and below. Among other recommendations, Benford (1997) suggests that researchers examine how frames are contested and negotiated within and between movements. Of his suggestions, this has been the one I have focussed on to explore how degrowth actors frame and defend the

degrowth discourse in conversation with proponents of other green political economy projects. Frames are shared and predefined structures that guide one's knowledge and perception of the world (and categories of objects, events or actions within it) (Donati 1992, 142–43). While bringing some things into focus for the receiver frames simultaneously exclude other things, preventing them from "coming to mind". For example, the term degrowth is said to bring about connotations of declining GDP, economic recession, job losses, and austerity times (Drews and Antal 2016). Metaphors are one such mechanism for (counter-)framing (Lakoff and Johnson 2003)

In the literature, there are discrepancies regarding what discourse analysis can infer about the text, the speaker and the group or movement of collective actors they associate with. Benford (1997) criticises social movement framing scholars for their tendency to anthropomorphise movements. He calls this tendency the reification problem, in which socially constructed notions are interpreted to be agentive when, of course, it is the human participant in the movement that does the speech action. He says reification neglects human agency and emotions when describing how the movement or organisation speaks and acts." However, in correcting for this, scholars can analyse too far in the opposite direction and risk falling into reductionism, forgetting that frames are socially or culturally constructed and not in a cognitive schema an individual is born with (Benford 1997).

Taylor (2001) argues that discourse analysts must be careful not to make broad unwarranted claims about the inner worlds of a speaker but only about the discourse itself (texts and discourse practices in the small-d sense). With regard to social movements and cultural studies, Billig (1995) takes an anticognitive approach too, saying one cannot expect to infer the 'true' motivations and cognitive frameworks of movement participant or speaker. Instead, the analysis can examine what *actions* are accomplished in speech. Other analysts argue it is possible to locate cognitive frameworks through linguistic details in micro-discourse analysis to make inferences about the inner worlds of actors, albeit imperfectly (Johnston 1995, 220; Koller 2012, 23). Even when focusing on micro-discourse, texts should be treated holistically so that specific passages and linguistic details are put in the context of the whole text and the cultural context of the speech practice (Johnston 1995). The Foucauldian perspective argues that focusing on the linguistic details in a text risks reducing discourse analysis to dwell only within the texts and neglect the 'extra-textual factors'

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(such as history, materiality, identity, beliefs) which are of interest in discourse analysis (Hook 2007). The production (and retention) of meaning, values, identity and even power can become the object of interest by looking at how people speak and write. "The social effects of texts depend upon processes of meaning-making [...] it is meanings that have social effects rather than texts as such" (Fairclough 2003, 11).

As am interested in the how degrowth actors construct their discourse (and the marginality of it) I make the following decisions for my analysis: Discourse analysis requires a multi-level analysis of both linguistic, textual details (micro-level), discourse practices (meso-level) and social context (macro-level) to be valid (Gasper, Portocarrero, and St.Clair 2013; Johnston 1995; Koller 2012).[14] Furthermore, unless they can be supported with linguistic details, I will avoid making claims about the cognitive schemas of actors. Even then, claims ought to be made conservatively and within the cultural context of their speech practice (Johnston 1995). Actors should be treated as thinking, feeling, suffering, passionate social agents, with multiple, socially situated roles, their motivations and inner psychological processing "cannot simply be read off texts" (Koller 2012, 23).

Codetta

To summarise, discourse is about meaning-making — ways of saying, doing and being, brought together through language and argumentation. I have introduced the concepts that are most relevant and necessary for my analysis, which takes an argumentative turn. Discourse coalitions, collective identity and social movement frames are analytical concepts that can be deployed to analyse discourse on various levels. It is necessary to study the discursive (and relational) effects of the degrowth movement's discourse, which are enacted by social actors (such as movement intellects). Firstly, this is an underdeveloped area of academic enquiry. Secondly, because the movement remains marginal and previous research suggests that critical awareness of one's rhetoric may assist actors to popularise counter-discourses. Due to the embeddedness of language, I assume that it is not easy for social actors to change their rhetoric. Though master discourses constrain them, they are not merely passive vehicles of discourse. Situated in their various roles and social and cultural contexts such as whole movements or institutions, I assume actors face a contradictory tension

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[14] Section 4.1.2 will address validity of discourse analysis methods in detail.

between structural challenges and creative opportunities when articulating a proposal and vision for degrowth. As such, the utterances of degrowth proponents and allies as they debate and defend the necessity for a societal transition beyond growth provide an exciting opportunity to explore why degrowth remains marginal. In my analysis, I deploy the concepts introduced in this chapter following the methodology laid out in the chapter that follows.

4   Methodology

With the background to degrowth now established and the theoretical frameworks mapped out to situate my research question and approach as suitable and necessary, I will now turn to methodology. To achieve what O'Leary (2017) calls *auditability* I will also describe the process of searching for and selecting data sources as well as the preparation and early coding of the texts for analysis. I first argue for the suitability and use of James Paul Gee's approach to *do* the analysis. I will address issues of *validity* (Gee 2011), and throughout the chapter, I will relate them to other indicators of quality in discourse analysis (O'Leary 2017; Taylor 2001). Finally, I will discuss the limitations of the chosen method and other reflexive insights relevant to my research process.

4.1   Discourse analysis as a method

4.1.1   Justifying the corpus and sourcing texts

There are a myriad of possible sources that could be used to represent the post-growth discourse. Rather than conduct interviews or field observations, it is common for researchers to draw from available material to study transition discourses or green political economy discourse (Audet 2016; Feola and Jaworska 2018; Stevenson 2019). Degrowth has not been institutionalised to the extent that organisations or policy documents exist in the name of degrowth. Formal degrowth institutions are limited to academic research groups and their discourse accessible through scholarly publications and books. However, the movement's discourse can also be sourced (online) from panels, interviews, opinion pieces, illustrations and social media content from individuals and groups.[15] I assembled a corpus of texts from debates and discussions between actors from various "camps" in the growth/degrowth debate. The actors are not necessarily leaders, but they are influential as thought leaders and public advocates for (or against) degrowth. They engage in boundary work in that "they are influential in changing the legitimate discursive resources and identities available to

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[15] See for example research and conference group websites: degrowth.org, postgrowth.org, degrowth.se, and www.decrescita.it/dec/index.html.

others, by virtue of their persuasiveness, perceived expertise, or charisma" (McCalman and Connelly 2019, 553).

The actors publically available discussions and engagement with audiences and other actors provided rich and textured material I have chosen to analyse for numerous reasons. Firstly, it struck me as an exciting opportunity to examine the *natural talk* of actors I would otherwise not have access to. Natural talk or argumentation in action and is unabridged, unedited and in situ and without the impact of the researcher's presence during the speech act. Taylor (2001) suggests that the sample should represent typical rather than exceptional participants, or in this case, native speakers of a discourse. Moreover, Stevenson (2019, 536) emphasises that "The most important aspect of compiling statements is to ensure that they reflect the tone and substance of public or stakeholder communication, rather than the voice or perspective of the researcher".

Secondly, sources of natural talk are interesting for a discourse analysis as we can observe thinking in action (Billig 1995; Taylor 2011). In other words, the sources would not only be *about* the topic of this thesis but also *construct* the discourse of the degrowth movement. It is impossible to know the extent to which individual agents are constructing a movement's discourse, or if they are merely reproducing existing discourses available to them (McCalman and Connelly 2019). It is not my intention to speculate on this but rather to select texts where actors both articulate an argument and enable new ways of thinking and speaking about environmental problems from a post or de-growth perspective.

Thirdly, the argumentative approach to discourse analysis makes way for studying the relational aspects of collective identity processes and framing disputes in discourse. Degrowth proponents do not construct their discourse in isolation. The reception by those outside the movement and how actors struggle to frame and counter-frame the debate is an important factor for the discursive construction of social movements. The study of this can illuminate how those in opposition to degrowth deliberately misunderstand or undermine degrowth and how actors seek to maintain or compete for discursive hegemony (Benford and Snow 2000). Even the varieties of audiences — those that read or hear the utterances are a factor for analysis as movement intellects try to convince them of their arguments (Donati 1992).

However, the choice to include *debates* in my source material is also not without limitation. Often debates do not intend for two parties to reach an agreement, influence policy formation, attempt to explore or resolve differences to form alliances (Fairclough 2003). So, the failure of actors to reach consensus or persuade the other party can be emblematic of the debate genera and not necessarily the result of a poorly constructed argument or problematic discourse. Thus, the very nature of some of the source material may not be to go beyond confrontation and polemics. The corpus also includes texts that were enacted as an open dialogue and ongoing conversation between the actors or facilitated to inform new audiences.

Text selection

Discourse analysts will often argue that the labour intensity of their art warrants a small corpus (Gee 2011). Thus, to provide the basis of a relevant and appropriate argument, eight core texts, within my chosen scope, were selected for analysis (see table 1, further information can be found in the list of sources).

Table 1: Core sources for analysis ordered by date, including the setting and categorisation of each speaker.

Speaker or Author	Source setting	Intext
PG – Kate Raworth DG – Giorgos Kallis	From Poverty to Power, Oxfam blog, online	(Raworth 2015) (Kallis 2015)
PG/SG – Peter Victor GG – Michael Pollin	The Real News Network, USA, online	(Real News 2016)
AG – Jeroen van den Bergh DG – Giorgos Kallis	Student organised debate, University of Barcelona (UoB), Spain	(UoB 2017)
PG – Tim Jackson GG – David Folkerts-Landau	ZEIT Economic Forum, Hamburg, Germany	(ZEIT Wirtschaftsforum 2018)
DG – Giorgos Kallis PG – Tim Jackson	Post-Growth Conference, European Parliament, Belgium	(Post-Growth Conference 2018)
PG/DG – Kevin Anderson O – Molly Scott-Cato	Festival of Social Science, The Political Economy Centre (UoM), UK	(PEC 2018a)
DG – Gorgios Kallis GG – Michael Jacobs	Festival of Social Science, The Political Economy Centre (UoM), UK	(PEC 2018b)
DG – Tone Smith DG – Cecilie Sachs Olsen	Oslo Architecture Triennale, Centre for Development and Environment (UiO), Norway	(SUM 2019)

Abbreviations:
PG - Post-Growth, DG - Degrowth, AG - A-growth, GG - Green Growth, O - Other

I restricted the scope of the literature conservatively to avoid cherry-picking from a much larger pool of potential sources. I sought out recent (not more than five years old) secondary sources that are publically available and openly accessible for public viewing and reading. I chose to analyse debates or discussions between key figures engaged in the topic — noting here that I set out to study numerous perspectives, not just the perspective of degrowthers. I focused on sources *about* growth — be it slow growth, degrowth or the impact of low-carbon or sustainable transitions on economic growth. I excluded interviews, presentations and promotional videos by single individuals about specific case studies as they lacked the polemic and dialogic elements I intended to study.

My internet and video searches used the keywords: *Debate*, *panel* and *discussion* including the terms *degrowth* and *green growth*.[16] The yielded results were assessed, and I recorded my initial impressions and early open codes (PEC 2018a, PEC 2018b). Using a snowballing data-gathering technique, I ran additional searches that drew from repeatedly mentioned names, movements and concepts from the growing corpus. For example, the repeated mention of Davos led to a search of World Economic Forum panels and debates (ZEIT Wirtschaftsforum 2018); more nuanced positions in the debate such as *slow growth*, *post-growth*, *steady-state* and *a-growth* (Real News 2016, UoB 2017); and the terms *prosperity*, *voluntary simplicity*, and *sustainability,* which are often connected to degrowth (Post-Growth Conference 2018). I selected the resultant videos, audio and already transcribed discussions, panels and debates.

My research question, and therefore data sources, are not limited to one particular country or region. As such, I sought out geographical diversity in my sources and used search terms that are typical of the discourse. However, the sources were restricted to the English-language locatable on the internet or observable in person. Thus, the corpus does not reflect what is unpublished or in languages other than English.[17] It is worth noting that at this stage of data gathering, most sources represented expert, academic, political, male and European perspectives. Female, non-European

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[16] Searches used wild cards to allow variations such as discuss, discussion, discussed and Post-Growth, Post Growth and Postgrowth

[17] A small but relevant factor worth acknowledging some actors are Spanish, Dutch and German, and English is not their first language. However, as much of their scholarship and work is carried out in English, I cannot expect this to bias my analysis unfairly.

(particularly Annex 2 countries), young people, lay-people and practitioners were absent from the search results.

As a Caucasian female of the professional-managerial class, I also acknowledge I am partially responsible for the *elite bias* in my research (Benford 1997). The speakers in the texts chosen are predominantly elite and expert, mostly male and entirely Caucasian. I had envisioned more range from a movement that claims (and aims) to be diverse (Demaria et al. 2013). My research focuses on actors reproducing and transforming the degrowth discourse, so the lack of diversity in the source material says something about the discourse — it is to a large extent academic, Caucasian, male and elite. As previously alluded to, I attemped to broaden my search to include a variety of gendered and cultured perspectives. However, I concede that the nature of my source material search and selection naturally favoured these actors who already have the means and access to have their perspectives published and shared on the internet.

In an attempt to diversify the perspectives in the corpus, I sought out other types of texts from the same search terms. I considered articles and opinion pieces hosted by personal blogs and podcasts, news websites and international organisations' websites. Texts were only considered for analysis if they met the selection criteria of being polemical or dialectic and published after 2014. One was a debate hosted on the Oxfam blog, *From Poverty to Power*, between Gorgios Kallis (2015) and Kate Raworth (2015) about the framing and choice of the word *degrowth*. It was included because, although not spoken, it does develop as quite an authentic conversation, with each author referring directly to the other. It stimulated an extensive conversation in the comments section, in which both authors participated. Given the international spread of the post-growth proponents, online discussions and forums are typical and in keeping with the source selection criteria. I was able to attend a panel discussion hosted by the Centre for Development and Environment in partnership with the Oslo Architecture Triennale (SUM 2019).[18] The panel included speakers who are activists and/or academics from Extinction Rebellion, Noereh, Rethinking Economics Norway and the Oslo Architecture Triennale.

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[18] The Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019 theme was Degrowth. Unable to record the event, my analysis draws from my notes and paraphrased transcription of quotes.

4.1.2   Doing valid analysis

CDA is a highly interpretive craft — so much so that some scholars reject developing a framework or guideline and instead follow their intuition and experience backed with widely recognised tools and credible ways to validate their findings (Mogashoa 2014; Taylor 2001). However, for the requirements of a master's research project, I have chosen to follow James Paul Gee's methodology for discourse analysis. By doing so, I strive to achieve what O'Leary calls *dependability* — an indication that the analysis was consistent, systematic, well documented and accounts for research subjectivity (2017, 68).

Analysis

Over 500 minutes of audio was transcribed and combined with pre-transcribed sources for analysis.[19] As a starting point, I used Nvivo preliminarily to explore word frequency, keywords and topics that emerged in the corpus. The texts had similar coverage on the topics of growth, energy, climate, environment, economy, policy/politics. However, keywords alone reveal very little for discourse analysis, but they are a recommended starting point for coding (Fairclough 2003; Feola and Jaworska 2018, 4; Taylor 2001).

Gee (2011) calls his discourse analysis method a soup, mixed from ingredients borrowed from and recognised by discourse analysts. It is a collection of various "tools of inquiry and strategies for using them" or "thinking devices" (Gee 2011, 11). Although Gee says the soup is not uniquely his, I will, for the sake of ease, refer to it as his.

Gee (2011) provides six tools of inquiry about seven building tasks to give structure and guidance to discourse analysis. *Building tasks* look at how language can enact or build the world. They are about how language makes things **significant/**insignificant (repetition, emphasis and silence), enact **practices**/activities, **identities**, **relationships**, convey a **political** perspective (how to distribute social goods), **connects**/disconnects things and privilege specific **sign systems** (ways of knowing). *Tools of inquiry* analyse

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[19] Missing and inaudible pieces of audio were excluded. These were usually audience questions and moderators' prompts. One source was missing more than half the audio as two of the four speakers video conference feed is inaudible – so only two speakers, Kevin Anderson and Molly Scott-Cato, were included in the analysis.

the inner workings of these building tasks. They are used as thinking devices to explore **social languages, discourses, conversations, intertextuality, figured worlds**, and **socially situated meanings**. Gee's methodology guides the analyst to use these thinking devices and tools to ask certain types of questions (and questions about those questions) to deconstruct a text and reconstruct the world(s) in which they are taking place. For example, concerning identity, one can ask of the texts: "Given what the speaker has said or the writer has written, and how it has been said or written, what identity or identities (for the speaker/ writer, the listener/ hearer, and in terms of how others are depicted) are relevant in this context?" (102). Regarding the figured worlds of a speaker one can ask "What must I, as an analyst, assume people feel, value, and believe, consciously or not, in order to talk (write), act, and/or interact this way?" (95). Gee offers 42 of these questions to guide the analyst to systematically and critically analyse a text, then extend the observations to other parts of the corpus and onto additional sources.

My notes and reflections on the questions, particularly the ones that converge at the same theme, are organised to address the research questions (Gee 2011, 125) Moreover, in attempting to illuminate something we do not yet understand, this method can uncover other questions we did not know to ask. As such, in a circular and iterative process, I explored the texts and related them to theory and literature and noted my observations. In doing so, more questions would emerge and lead to more in-depth analysis or suggestions for future research.

Gee's approach is useful because it can be blended with the analytical concepts I have detailed in the previous chapter (11). To blend my analytical framework with Gee's soup, I examined a number of specific features relevant to the concepts presented in Section 3.1. I mention them here in a non-exhaustive list. I paid particular attention to the more novel and imaginative constructions of speech interspersed with more "rational argumentation" (Donati 1992). For example (1) Naturalisation to make some things appear to be more reasonable or inevitable than others. (2) Passivation and nominalisation to conceal agency or attribute agency to actions. (3) Modality and evaluation markers as an indicator of a speaker's commitment to truth claims and judgments of what is necessary, desirable and good. In noting the surprising amount of agreement shared by the actors occupying different positions on the debate, I also paid attention to (4) terms of praise and agreement. To examine collective identity, I

observed (5) identity markers and the use of plural pronouns such as "we", "our", "they", "them" (see figure 1). Among other features, I noted (6) register and tone; (7) first-person storytelling; and (8) framing devices such as metaphor.

To inform and contextualise my analysis (Koller 2012; Taylor 2001), I spent time becoming familiar with the speakers, their work and the occasion. I read additional post- and degrowth resources such as websites, social media groups, blogs and e-newsletters.[20] Doing so enriched my observations and allowed me to become more familiar with *native speak* of the discourses,[21] as well as other elements relevant to carrying out Gee's tools of inquiry (social languages, conversations, intertextuality, figured worlds and situated meanings).

Validity

Now, a word on what Gee (2011) calls validity (122-124). I use Gee's approach not to discover a single 'truth' about the degrowth discourse, nor do I presume that I can solve a problem through objective analysis. Subjectivity is an unavoidable reality of qualitative research — I the researcher cannot escape my positionality, so instead use it among other tools to interpret and explore the data (Audet 2016, 19; Taylor 2001; Hajer 1995; Leipold et al. 2019). Quality and credibility can still be pursued, though always contested and open for debate (Gee 2011). One clear advantage of using his approach is that it very clearly provides guidance for achieving validity through (1) convergence, (2) agreement, (3) coverage and (4) linguistic detail.

(1) **Convergence**: Findings can be deemed more trustworthy if many independent findings converge to support the analysis. In other words, the analyst can build up a more robust argument by answering more and more of the questions. Thus, I have used Gee's building tasks and tools of inquiry approach to structure the exploration and analysis of each text.

(2) **Agreement**: Findings are more convincing the more the conclusions are supported by others. Others being discourse analysts who share the theoretical assumptions laid out here; researchers outside of the tradition (e.g. ecological economists, political ecologists and so on); and native speakers of the discourse in

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[20] Only when relevant to my presentation of the analysis and discussion, have I footnoted the supplementary and superfluous material or listed it as a source.
[21] Native speakers being those who belong to a Discourse and know it well.

question and the social languages it entails. In other words, research that engages in dialogue is more open to validation both by the communities or subjects being studied and transdisciplinary scholars. Good research moves forward by conversation, not just methodology — so I draw from and relate to an array of interdisciplinary scholarship.

(3) **Coverage**: The more an analysis can extend to other sorts of data, the more valid it becomes. There is thus a predictive quality to discourse analysis as we find patterns in a sample of data and can begin to expect what might happen in similar texts. However, findings that do not extend to other types of data are not necessarily invalid. They can reveal the boundaries of a finding and set limits to generalisability. Concerning coverage, I have provided a detailed account of my source selection process in the following section and mention attempts to become more familiar with the big D discourses involved in the degrowth debate. Where relevant and interesting, other sources were brought in, to extend the analysis. In other words, to continue to build validity in coverage, the discussion was extended beyond the core texts.

(4) **Linguistic Details**: Findings are more valid the more closely they relate to linguistic details — micro-level features such as semantics, grammar, vocabulary and phonology. Language has evolved to carry out a variety of functions, and an analyst must uncover and argue for how specific linguistic details have been arranged to communicate a specific meaning or imply certain assumptions. Given that this is highly interpretive, agreement from native speakers and the literature becomes necessary. In short, the analysis must be grounded in the text to infer what is being communicated between the lines. Thus, I have made sure to draw from many scholars to supplement my analysis of the text and contextualised the texts by exposing myself to other forms of native speak involved in the degrowth debate.

Gee's framework is broadly consistent with the analytical theoretical concepts laid out in Chapter 3. Moreover, a transdisciplinary approach to make sense of and draw conclusions from the analysis works towards a degree of validity with regard to agreement. However, these findings are always tentative and open to revision as we learn more about the context. The 'ideal' discourse analysis can never be complete. One cannot feasibly analyse every linguistic detail, extend the analysis to every possible text, find agreement from all observers or fully satisfy convergence — nor should one want to. To validity, I would then add that the adequacy or success of CDA "is measured by its effectiveness and relevance, that is, by its contribution to change"

(Van Dijk 1993, 253). Thus, our claims ought to be modest to be effective (van Dijk 2011).

4.2   **Reflexive positioning**

I acknowledge (perhaps to McCloskey's pleasure and horror) that there is a potential irony to my thesis. Despite my agreeance and argument that scholars and movement intellects taking an ecological turn need to be more aware of their rhetoric, I too am required to give in to the "epistemological excesses" required of a master thesis (Stettler 1995). To persuade my reader of the quality research presented in its pages, my writing is embedded in academic discourse and steeped in rhetoric (as all writing is).

As a researcher, I am not a neutral observer of degrowthers and their collective action through movement participation, intellectual practices or policy work. As per Melucci's (1995, 58–59) advice on studying collective identity in social movements, I acknowledge the following: First, that the actors in these texts and degrowth proponents generally understand and make meaning of their actions independently to the researcher's observation of them. Second, my personal experiences and philosophy can easily modify the analysis and presentation of that analysis. Lastly, to rectify this, I offer the reader my reflexive positioning and personal reflections.

My position in the degrowth debate is ever-shifting. I would call myself a sympathetically critical degrowth movement ally, and it is this positioning that led me to select this thesis topic. I would not have been able to propose this research project without an understanding and concern for the negative consequences of an unlimited growth paradigm (Hueting 2010). From the eco-socialist left, my first intuitive reaction was that degrowth is an exciting word that puts alternative ideas on the agenda for discussion. I was attracted to the degrowth movement for its comprehensiveness and complexity as a transition movement — to me; it is undeniably bold and challenging. Then the more I read and analysed the text, the more despondent I became. I felt the degrowth message was ineffective and the movement minuscule as I was cognisant that almost no one I spoke to knew what degrowth was. Sometimes perhaps too challenging, too utopic and lacking in a coherent strategy or theory of change. However, I sympathise with the struggles of social and environmental movements. I

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have worked and volunteered with environmental non-government organisations and climate justice groups. I also see that the green growth paradigm is well-meaning as I have also worked as a sustainability officer in municipal government. I have found it easier to use messaging akin to green growth and sustainable development arguments in my work. However, as sustainability became more popular and better understood, it was also co-opted. The notion of the triple bottom line still favoured economic sustainability over social and environmental outcomes.

Lastly, the events of 2020 warrant some reflection — catastrophic bush fires in Australia, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Black Lives Matter outcry. I expect these events may have also impacted my reader — and so our relationship to the world changes. These events have forced me to reflect on my relationship to the degrowth movement and its purpose and positioning. By extension, they influenced my interpretation of the texts and the actors. Even though my source material existed before discussions of a "post-Corona economy" emerged,[22] I feel that they are more even salient than before. I have become more understanding of why movements use radical framing and call for drastic societal transformation.

Rather than attempt to arrive at one conclusion or be prescriptive, I have chosen to adopt an exploratory approach. I have not set out to defend degrowth, nor to criticise it. Instead, I use my critical and ever-shifting position in the debate as a resource to see more than one (though of course not all) sides of it. My analysis accepts that there are a multiplicity of interpretations one can make from the texts and inferences about the actors and the movement. As an antidote to theorising that attempts to be neat and tidy, I will illuminate several dilemmas and paradoxes as to how movement intellects contribute to the advancing and marginalising the degrowth discourse. My conclusions are not intended to be prescriptive; they endeavour to assist change agents to consider both the challenges and opportunities for their discourse. Moreover, they can use this awareness to advance the counter-hegemonic struggle, destabilise the current hegemony and establish a new paradigm for a profound societal transformation (Purcell 2009, 158).

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[22] In response to the Covid-19 pandemic theer have been political-economic discussions regarding how national economies will recover (and possibly be reorganised or made more resilient).

5 Does degrowth have a framing dilemma?

In the following analytical chapters, I will explore how the advocacy of degrowth unfolds in the corpus. By looking beyond the methodological and epistemological discrepancies in green political economic thought and practice. Degrowth and its discourse coalitions are not unified. It is unsurprising then that in the corpus scholars and advocates from the heterodox community of actors will disagree about all manner of issues, including how to frame their proposals. Even in the scientific work of traditional economists "they argue about the aptness of economic metaphors, the relevance of historical precedents, the persuasiveness of introspections, the power of authority, the charm of symmetry, the claims of morality." (McCloskey 1983, 482).

In this chapter, I will explore how the debate is framed in the corpus. I find that the heart of the debate lies in the argumentative dimensions of language, which contributes to the success or failure of a movement and political projects (Billig 1995, 70). Framing disputes are a pervasive aspect of social movement dynamics. Contested frames shape the structure of a movement, relations with coalitions movements (and discourses) and collective identity construction (Benford and Snow 2000). Thus, how actors frame, counter-frame and dispute the appropriateness of the degrowth proposal will be studied.

To explore the question of why degrowth remains marginal, I will illustrate how the degrowth movement's framing is contested. To do so, I will first explore some surprising points of agreement between the actors in the corpus. Then I examine how degrowth is framed antithetically to growth. I present two perspectives. One perspective observes how degrowthers defend their framing and postulates what potential such framing offers to galvanise the movement. From the other, I argue that negative framing can be incongruent with and counterproductive to the movement's goals. Section 5.2 further examines the incongruence of framings used by degrowth proponents.[23] I will illustrate how the master frames used by degrowth proponents do

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[23] Linguistic incongruence is used as a feminist term to describe the inadequacy of linguistic resources (narratives, frames, vocabulary) for muted groups (for example women) to express themselves (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2011). As such, narrators of counter-discourses must draw from the resources available to them to articulate themselves (albeit clumsily or subversively) and "talk back" against the hegemonic discourses they wish to resist.

a disservice to the coherence of their vision and argument. I will also observe how some actors attempt to reorientate the conversation by counter-framing. Counter-framing is a discursive tactic to disconnect a dominant frame from the debate or an audience's mind (Benford and Snow 2000).

However, discourse incongruence and incoherence alone is an insufficient explanation for why the movement's discourse remains marginal. In a recapitulation, I introduce literature to begin to address the research questions. The degrowth discourse's marginality can, in part, be explained by the framing disputes between movement intellects within the green economy discourse (both heterodox coalition and pro-growth actors). However, discourse incoherence is an insufficient explanation for the movement's marginality (Benford and Snow 2000). Chapter 6 will address the relational elements of discourse to explore the marginality of the movement by analysisng collective identity processes.

5.1 Contested framing

5.1.1 Points of agreement

Across the entire corpus, the speakers (introduced in Table 1) agree that a sustainable low-carbon future with more renewable and efficient energy production and consumption is necessary. They are, after all both situated in green political economy discourse. Terms of agreement were frequently used in an attempt to bridge the perceived gap between the sides of the debates. However, post- and degrowth advocates seemed surprised and baffled by the commonalities, they found in each others arguments.

One significant point of agreement between speakers in the corpus relates to low-carbon transitions. Tim Jackson stammers on several occasions with surprise to find that the head of the Deutsche Bank, David Folkerts-Landau, shares some sentiments with the post-growth position. Jackson starts off to agree then pauses to say:

> Again we [pauses]. It's kind of strange to be on a platform with someone when I agree with almost everything and yet somehow I had a twist on it that I can't quite get my head around. I absolutely agree about the transition to a low-carbon society. (ZEIT Wirtschaftsforum, 2018)

The "twist" is that Folkerts-Landau and the institutions he represents do not share the same normative reasoning for the need to lower carbon emissions or share the same ideas as to how to achieve the transition, by whom, at what cost, and through which mechanisms. They are not motivated by the same values or understandings of history. Jackson emphasises the need to bring about prosperity and well-being to alleviate suffering and issues of inequality. While Falkerts-Landau, from when he first speaks, establishes the frame of the debate with "One of the greatest achievements of mankind was to come out of a thousand years of misery." He pre-emptively discounts whatever Jackson will say in response by asserting a view that is optimistic about humanity's ability to respond to the predictions of "doomsdayers" whom he says have, historically, been wrong and pessimistic about the evolution of technology and development.

Arguments such as Falkerts-Landau's neglect to acknowledge the foreshadowing of the limits to growth discourse in the 1970s had a significant impact on media and politics. They gave impetus for the eventual creation of many of the goals, policies and green parties that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s that remain today (Eckersley 1992, 12). Sustainable development and limits to growth discourses coevolved.[24] As did environmental economics and ecological economics, thus producing commonalities between the fields (Levallois 2010; Plumecocq 2014). In the above examples, another coevolution of agreement can be observed — that GDP is not a suitable measure on its own, and mainstream economists have been forced to acknowledge ecological and climatic issues and adjust their discourse accordingly (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994, 199).

For example, a significant point of agreement between all speakers is that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is not the most appropriate measure of societal success. Not only do they agree that GDP growth should not be the object of our concern, but many resent that the conversation revolves around it. Robert Pollin repeatedly states that he shares the concerns of degrowthers and about "using GDP as a measure of welfare, thinking that GDP is the be-all, end-all, [and] that economies have to grow to make living standards better" (Real News 2016). Kevin Anderson says "I always wish we

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[24] See Levallois (2010) for an exposition on the short lived, though effective alliance that was formed between the Club of Rome and Georgescu-Roegen, with the former using Georgescu-Roegen's credible economic expertise to defend their thesis in *The Limits to Growth Report* and the latter using the Club of Rome's influence to spread his theory that economic decline is inevitable in *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process*.

didn't discuss growth I'm really not interested in this thing called growth. It's completely abstract" (PEC 2018a). Despite actors tiring of the discussion, GDP was one of the most frequently occurring terms (in the top 10) used by actors from the heterodox coalitions.

Despite some superficial agreement the debate on growth ends in an ideological stalemate. The pursuit of agreement and common ground can be used as a rhetorical tool to mask the concerns of counter-hegemonic groups. "[M]asking is a useful tool for neo-liberal interests" (Purcell 2009, 153). It denies heterodox groups one of their most powerful discursive resources — counter-framing (Benford and Snow 2000). An agreement may seem innocuous, but for an already small counter-hegemonic discourse, such as degrowth, removing issues for actors to resist is like taking David's slingshot away. [25] The actors in the corpus are still able to proceed with a discussion and debate. However, it should be noted that this is one of several ways opponents of degrowth can pacify and remove discursive power from already marginal opinions (by extension, the groups they are affiliated with).

Thus, agreements should not be taken at face value by the audience member — the nuance is hidden in the countering and criticisms of views. Billing (1995) argues that rhetorical agreement does not advance good conversation. Moreover, that disagreement, discussion and counterarguments are a demonstration of thinking in action. Thus, agreement and shared interests should not distract from the debate about the very word degrowth, the movement's goals and framing choices. In fact, disputes, specifically regarding the framing of issues, can be *both* facilitative *and* detrimental to a social movement and the groups or organisations within it (Benford and Snow 2000, 626-7). This is one of several paradoxes to be illuminated in this thesis.

5.1.2   The *anti*-growth frame — what is it good for

As preciously stated, almost all speakers in the corpus express frustration that the degrowth debate is centred around economic growth. Interesting, given that most actors include the word growth in the name of their argument, the proposal or movement. Michael Jacobs expresses this contradiction clearly:

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[25] Other culturally resonant stories of an underdog with limited power can be substituted for the Christian story I grew up with.

> I'm really not very interested in GDP. I think it's a poor measure of the things we want in the economy and a very poor measured well-being of justice and all of those things […] if you focus your attention, as the degrowthers do, on GDP, you are missing the point of the natural environment and its impacts. Because these things are not correlated in an easy way. And what I don't understand about the degrowth position is why people who care passionately about the environment and about well-being are focused so much on something that is at best a weakly correlated, theoretically weakly correlated, proxy for it. (PEC 2018b)

Kate Raworth raises a similar point to this with Gorgios Kallis when she refers to Lakoff's "don't think of an elephant" expression — that to create a winning metaphor and argument one must not activate the dominant frames used by the hegemonic groups.[26] Growth framing brings to mind the same figured worlds, stories and associations that anti-growth groups wish to disentangle or disassociate from. The point being that degrowth's negative framing of growth still leads to one only to discuss and reinforce the growth paradigm, rather than an alternative type of economic system and society through the use of counter-frames.

In Barry's (2007) view the anti-growth and limits to growth discourses have "held back the theoretical development of a positive, attractive, modern conceptualisation of green political economy and radical conceptualisations of sustainable development" (460). He would prefer that they were not part of the green economy discourse. In Ferguson's (2015) analysis of the transformative potential of the green economy discourse he excludes concepts such as degrowth in his typology and claims that their negative stance makes them "either too vague or politically unpalatable" (22).

These two critiques of degrowth and the anti-growth framing can be counter-argued. Both neglect that degrowth derived from the francophone and discredit the growing social movement exists in its name. The movement would not, in all likelihood, swap degrowth for another word as degrowth has already become a slogan and storyline for the movement. Moreover, Ferguson (2015) recognises that even the counter-growth or growth neutral concepts might assist with transforming the current green economy discourse towards one that implies a post-growth future. However, there is no suggestion or theorising as to how. He concludes that "green economy communities of practice" need to emerge to advance the discourse from weak to strong (27). Such

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[26] She refers to Lakoff's (2004) book *Don't Think Of An Elephant! Know Your Values And Frame The Debate: The Essential Guide For Progressives*

communities of practice include small businesses, local cooperatives, and circular or self-sufficiency economics (Eckersley 1992, 140). His argument neglects to consider that the degrowth movement and its policy ideas entail these and other types of home-grown practical lifestyle initiatives (Eversberg and Schmelzer 2018; Muraca 2015). Ferguson's analysis is, as he admits, highly speculative. Nonetheless, the arguments against the negative framing of degrowth not uncommon (Drews and Antal 2016; Levallois 2010), and I will make some of my own in the next section.

Growth centric framing is not only observable in degrowth. Green growth, post-growth and a-growth each add a prefix in the same way degrowth does. Concerning their names, they are all equally as much framed in terms of growth as each other — more of it, less of it, without or neutral to it. Jeroen van den Berg defends a-growth saying "The word growth has to be there. So, we have to put something in front, with it or after it" (PEC 2017). He does not give a reason for needing growth in the name. Although he likes a-growth better than degrowth which is "negative", he does admit that it might not be the best name for his argument. The actors in the corpus have yet to or do not want to, find a way to articulate, succinctly what that something else is without relying on growth framing. Other scholars argue not to use growth-centric framing at all (Glasson 2015; Raworth 2015). For example, Voluntary Simplicity, Just Transitions, Great Transitions, Transition Towns or even economies of belonging, are non-standard, positively framed ideas that align with degrowth (Alexander 2013; Audet 2016).

Heterodox actors in the corpus dispute the utility of negative framing for the degrowth movement and its coalitions. However, a compelling argument can be made for the use of negative framing. A counter–growth frame reveals that the growth paradigm is not "innocent" (Kallis, PEC 2918a) or "innocuous", but that it has become an institutionalised and personified zeitgeist to the point of religiosity (Jackson, Post-Growth Conference 2018). Peter Victor, who says he prefers not to use the word degrowth, even accepts that there is some utility in the word as it "is all about *challenging* the growth paradigm" (Realtalk 2016). Smith at the SUM panel says "we should not be so afraid of *conflict*". She adds nuance by acknowledging differentiating violent conflict from conflicting opinions and disagreement which are uncomfortable for some people, but actually facilitate meaningful discussions for humanity. Her view is consistent with Billing (1995) and McCloskey (1983; 1998) . Kallis says the same,

but in a sharp contrast makes use of war metaphor: "what the term degrowth does is show that there is a *conflict*. […] We have to *combat* the ideology of growth; it won't disappear just by ignoring it" (Post-Growth Conference 2018).

Degrowth wishes to break the association that growth is good (Drews and Antal 2016). Moreover, by distinguishing 'us' from 'them' degrowthers not only depict themselves as contenders. They also reveal that growth is propped up by agents and decision-makers, not to be mistaken as inevitable or an impersonal force in economics and development. The framing *against* the growth paradigm aids to "destabilise the current hegemony and establish an alternative one" which is a necessary element of counter-hegemonic struggles to transform neoliberal power relations (Purcell 2009, 158).

Degrowth defenders find that a-growth and post-growth are too neutral — "we cannot afford to be agnostic" (Kallis 2015). Kallis rejects the call form post-growth allies to try more positive framing — and counters Raworth's (2015) and Lakoff's argument for counter-framing to say: "Then again, a-theists did pretty well in their battle against Gods. And so did those who wanted to abolish slavery" (Kallis 2015). In these two quotes, Kallis makes use of war metaphor such as "rallying cry", "disarm", "battle", "enemy". War metaphors further set up degrowth as a rebel movement armed with a "missile word" to resist and fight back against the dominant pro-growth ideology.

The choice of war metaphor sets up a fight between camps and a dualism that asks the audience to pick a side (I will set aside reading into the imperialist and colonial undercurrent of this for later). "War stories" also elicit a sense of comradery — soldiers in the trenches may hope to share a triumph (Fine 1995). It also raises the stakes of the conversation as wars are either won or lost. The audience must pick a side to battle on. How is the audience encouraged to choose? Kallis' comparison to anti-slavery and for example reminds the audience that the when enslavement of people was once normalised and today condemned. You want to be on the side of victors and emancipated. The reference to the enlightenment "battle against the Gods" also alludes to the pervasiveness of the pro-growth ideology. The victorious are the underdogs who become freed from the institutionalised and oppressive thinking. Degrowth is the David to the Goliath in a story where listeners are conditioned to root for the little guy. David, unarmored who uses thrift and bravery to win the battle and capture the head of the giant, armoured and armed warrior.

The choice of degrowth to be negatively framed not only shows that a conflict exists but also that the movement aims to be disruptive. Kallis in the Oxfam blog says "With its shock element 'de'-growth reminds that we won't have our cake and eat it all." The idiom is used to illustrate "absurdity of perpetual growth" and construct another dualism of two incompatible wants: Green growth cannot make GDP growth compatible with decreases in carbon and material footprints. Kallis (2015) continues to defend the word degrowth and the ideology behind it with non-standard language for the topic of progress and prosperity. "Please, let us be 'negative'. I can't take all that happiness. Grief, sacrifice, care, honour: life is not all about feeling 'better'". He says "be positive" is a North-American invention to be upheld at all costs. He invites other "southerners at heart" for whom the "idea of constant betterment and improvement has always seemed awkward" to "resist the demand to be positive" and "refusing to improve and be 'useful', has its allure". He contends with hegemonic discourse to challenge the commodification of time and humans as a resource to extract value or social capital. Both Kallis (2015) and Cecilia Sachs-Olesn (SUM 2019) refers to a George Monbiot quote that "capitalism can sell everything, but not less." This piece of intertextuality suggests who their ideal audience might be — anti-consumerists and anti-capitalists. However, I would be hesitant to accept that the wider public would be willing to mobilise around this narrative, especially when associated with the negative connotations of austerity and recession (which will be examined in Section 5.2.3).

The observation and argument made by proponents themselves that degrowth intends to be negatively framed can be extended to the book *Art Against Empire: Towards an Aesthetic of Degrowth* (Alexander 2017). The artwork and poetry in the anthology, I noticed, was often a mockery of consumer culture, capitalism, globalisation and modernity. The book captured the prophetic tenets of degrowth — the problems with the present, that the movement whishes to solve (Kamminga 2008, 288). Seldom were there positive depictions of what a post-growth future might actually look like. The aesthetic impressed upon me was a counter–culture of disruption (walking away from an office cubicle into a sunset); non-violent resistance (sacrificing an arm under a train on its tracks to break free from shackles or a head in a guillotine); and cautionary depictions of dystopias to avoid (cities turned to rubble, mechanised human and agricultural life, screens, advertising, barcodes and expansive resource extraction

landscapes and machines). Amidst them were images of ecological utopias: A phoenix rising from the ashes; empty and abandoned fields left to recover; an urban landscape with greenhouses, ample greenery and butterflies.

My brief descriptions do not do any justice to the artwork but do reflect the ratio of utopian to prophetic, dystopian images used to look ahead with and depict possible futures. The latter, negative depictions of a future planet and society to avoid and present-day realities of steering away from, outweigh the "inspirational" imagery of an alternative reality — what else could be (de Geus 2002, 197). In aesthetics and argument, degrowth intends to enact dissent and point out what is undesirable and must change. Negative framing facilitates the degrowth discourse to be prophetic and ward off apocalypse through what Hans Jonas calls "heuristics of fear" — an antidote to the optimistic and misfortunate "politics of ostriches" (Latouche 2014, 95). Thus, the insistence from allies and opponents to be positive and palatable takes the purpose of a prophetic discourse.

A picture may say a thousand words, but the rhetoric of some degrowth proponents, the art and poetry I have analysed did not convince me of degrowth insistence on being negative — at first. I finally came to appreciate the *de*growth when reflecting on the *de*colonisation. However, I wish to caution that decolonisation is not a metaphor. 'Decolonisation of the mind' refers to the semantic shift and exploration of one's psyche after generations of culturally conditioned racism.[27] 'De' is not about merely colonising *less* or the necessary reparations of territory and lives lost to genocide and affirmative action to right wrongs of the past (although that is part of the decolonising mission). Similarly, degrowth is not only about prioritising GDP less or a voluntary decline in economic growth, alongside regenerative agricultural practices, green funds or localisation of food and energy systems. Degrowth aims to help communities of people to recognise and unlearn the relatively recent addicting "habit" or "fetish" of growth (Wilhite 2016; Hamilton 2003). De is not merely down; neither is it as "simply different" as the movement's slogan claims — a snail, not an elephant (see illustration adjacent to the introduction). It is radically different, thus requires a novel storyline to transport its idea(l)s.

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[27] Coined by Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in reference the language of colonisers still being dominant across Africa today and the use of English in de-colonial scholarship.

Some degrowth proponents have been accused of co-opting the term *decolonisation*. French economist and degrowth philosopher Serge Latouche first described degrowth as "decolonisation of the social imaginary from economic growth" (Deschner and Hurst 2018). Deschner and Hurst (2018) explain that decolonisation has been *inappropriately* used as a metaphor for the various things that could be improved in a post-colonial society. In this way, decolonisation is used as degrowth jargon and vocabulary.[28] Its original and still pertinent meaning is diminished to just another, fit-for-all process of liberation. I do not raise the decolonisation as jargon or to suggest that the 'de' in degrowth is appropriate discursive tool for the movement's aims. However, it might be a useful thinking aid for the unconvinced reader that degrowth is an entirely different way of thinking from the idea of endless expansion.

To illustrate, Kallis and Anderson both touch on the idea that people, particularly elites and those in wealthy countries, cannot expect to go on having the same level of consumption and comfortable lifestyles. Anderson says "We have tried to make, think to ourselves and convince other people that was something special about us that should allow us, this particular small group to consume hugely" (PEC 2018a). Kallis says that "denying our self-importance" is an antidote to the growth. "Our" refers to the "southerners at heart" who find degrowth appealing. Although not explicit, he touches on an ecocentric ethic by suggesting that degrowth offers a corrective to an anthropocentric society where humans as superior to other living and non-living forms on Earth.

Ecological economics also reorients the economy and society within the ecological system (as opposed to equally valuing social, economic, environment). However, anthropocentrism has not been an explicit topic of discussion in the literature on degrowth and valuing all life (not just human life) is not explicitly discussed in these texts. The intention for degrowth to support ecocentric thought and practice comes across weakly in the corpus. In fact, Rodríguez-Labajos et al. (2019) suggest that degrowth is anthropocentric and individualistic compared to Environmental Justice groups in the Global South. Thus, I will next turn to the marginalising effects of the

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[28] Once again it has been endorsed in Chapter 25: *Imaginary, the decolonisation of,* in the edited book *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era* (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2014).

degrowth discourse as enacted by its movement intellects. I also infer how degrowthers run the risk of alienating potential alliances.

5.1.3   Anti the degrowth frame — a backfire word

In this section, I will move away from examining the possible merits and reasons for groups and actors who critique growth (be they agnostic, post, slow or degrowth proponents) to use growth framing (as seen in the previous section). I will now take up a critique of the word degrowth by supporting my empirical observations with relevant literature. In doing, I postulate on how the heretical, negative and Eurocentric elements of the discourse may fail to convey an inclusive or alluring story for degrowth. The word is both fruitful to transition movements and backfires. I specifically offer three reasons for degrowthers to reconsider their insistence on.

First, regarding war metaphors: To the sympathetic reader, such rhetorical techniques might be emotive and enticing. However, for a sceptical audience member, not yet part of the comradery and native speak of degrowthers is perhaps not inspiring. Are individuals who are anxious about climate change and concerned about social and environmental issues, yet are instinctively pro-growth, ready to abandon a familiar paradigm that is under attack by degrowth proponents (McCalman and Connelly 2019)?

There is a proverb "if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." Eisenstein (2019) describes that with the thinking that one is at war, one begins to anticipate enemies to fight. Degrowth is furnished with discursive tools of dissent and resistance, even contempt for prevailing and hegemonic growth paradigm in capitalism and the modern psyche. The result is the constant defence of marginal ideas and attack of potential allies who are perceived to be opponents. Kallis, Anderson, Victor and Smith appeared to be defensive in their speech. The pace at which they spoke, the stress of their voice, their overall tone and volume indicated that they were, impassioned to get their ideas across. Their argumentation hints at feelings of despair and frustration. War language introduces a sense of hostility and aggression into the discourse. It is not congruent with pluralistic, emancipatory and democratic processes that are advocated for by many groups in the movement (Fournier 2008). Though in practice, degrowth has been a non-violent form of activism (Renou 2014), fighting

speak and negative framing may be alienating and unappealing and thus counterintuitive for recruitment to or expansion of the movement.

While defending the anti-growth framing degrowth actors have also struggled and, in these texts, continue to struggle to steer their conversations toward what else the goals or 'sources' of degrowth are (Demaria et al. 2013)[29]. Social welfare, for example, is often overlooked by both green and degrowth because they both focus on economic growth (Jakob and Edenhofer 2014). In the texts that took place in lecture halls had Kallis and Anderson open their arguments with a defence of their research and modelling to diagnose the current state of affairs and prognose the inevitability a shrinking economy. Their arguments labour over the pitfalls of growth and treat a vision of what a post-growth future (and process of degrowth) entails as an afterthought. For example, to close his argument Kallis (PEC 2018b) uses the last remaining minutes of his lecture to rebuttal counter-arguments from the conference series. They expend little time describing an alternative system, the policies and values that would be necessary to degrow towards a post-growth state. Moreover, there is a notable silence in the corpus regarding grassroots initiatives and projects are almost absent from these texts. When so much time is spent on the prognosis and defence of degrowth there is little time left to discuss what degrowth would look like in practice. However, it is particularly important that when advocating for degrowth that actors work to clearly articulate the benefits of a post-growth future to move past the negative connotations.

Second, it is not intuitive that degrowth is "simply different" (Drews and Antal 2016). *De*growth makes use of an orientational metaphor — down. Down is linked to adverse physical and cultural experiences. Except for some cultural interpretations down is associated with sad, unconscious, death, lack of control, force, low status, bad, depravity and mundane reality (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 15).

At times degrowth proponents, both explicitly and metaphorically, enlist negative connotations in their defence of degrowth. Recall Kallis (2015) resisting positive feelings. Some of the metaphorical associations of degrowth explicitly bring to mind

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[29] Degrowth sources are described by Demaria et al. (2013) as ecology, critique of development and praise for anti-utilitarianism, meaning of life and well-being, bioeconomics, democracy and justice.

low status and mundane reality by encouraging the denial of one's self-importance. Depravity is associated with austerity, sacrifice and living with less. This association is incongruent with the movement's aims to promote lifestyles of sufficiency rather than excess. For example, Anderson (PEC 2018a) makes a similar point to others regarding the voluntary sacrifice of material goods and high consuming lifestyles. Almost shouting, he says: "That's exactly what I want to bring about. Austerity and recession and reduction in material consumption by those of us who have abused the system for the last 30 to 50 years".

Anderson demonstrates a failure to frame voluntary degrowth as different from unplanned declining economic growth. His argument conforms to the dominant assumptions of degrowth as a recession state. Such inadequate for transporting the benefits of a post-growth future. Downward metaphors bring to mind a lack of control, which is incongruent with movement's efforts to portray degrowth as a planned for, voluntary process and "prosperous way down"[30]. Choices such as this risk undermining the efforts made by his peers to frame counter-growth ideas in terms of well-being, quality of life and prosperity. We cannot know if his chosen wording is performative and aimed to shock or if he has not yet found alternative words (counter-frames) that describe a future state without relying on austerity and recession.

Ferguson (2015) argues that regardless of how necessary the transition towards a post-growth future, degrowth (as well as steady-state economics and ecosocialism) is prone to marginalisation from the outset. "[T]hese discourses are unlikely to have sufficient political purchase to effect this transformation. This is because, by directly opposing growth, they are prone to marginalisation" (22). Degrowthers are not the only ones producing texts about the topic. It is worth noting how the word and ideas are taken up in media and public discourse. The negative connotations of degrowth such as the ensuing misery recalled from past experiences of recession and austerity are used to overshadow any positive elements of degrowth. Take for example the headlines: *Degrowth fetishists just be honest you would make people poorer to fight climate change* (Paul 2019) and *The coronavirus crisis reveals the misery of 'degrowth'* (McAleenan 2020). The negative portrayal of degrowth by critics coupled with the

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[30] Degrowth is often related to the arguments for peaceful and prosperous global energy transition in A *Prosperous Way Down* (Odum and Odum 2001).

movement's own use of negative frames and connotations do not flatter degrowth as an inspiring call to action for the public, policymakers or potential allies.

Even with their best efforts to frame degrowth positively, I would not presume degrowth to have "allure" for many people (Kallis 2015). Environmentalism that utilises negative messages of looming tragedy and doomism are criticised for being unempowering and demotivational (Anderson 2010). The rhetoric of sacrifice, scarcity, doom and gloom do not create an appealing visual motif (Bruner and Oelschlaeger 1994, 395). Consider the "I have a dream" speech may not have resonated so effectively had it been "I had a nightmare". Despite the merits as a prophetic discourse, as a social movement aiming to bring about a transformational paradigm shift, degrowth needs to be paired with a narrative that appeals to a larger populace than the current niche, political agents and a broad coalition of groups (Buch-Hansen 2018). In comparison to the "American Dream" or equivalent aspirations to which many modernised people aspire, degrowth argued for in such negative frames leaves much to be desired (Witoszek 2016). Intellectual advocates of degrowth need to include stories of a new type of dream.

Third, Kallis, from Spain, assumes a natural alliance with other "Southerners at heart". I will illustrate how the defence of the anti-growth framing takes for granted the alliance degrowthers may suppose they have with Environmental Justice groups in the Global South (Rodríguez-Labajos et al. 2019). In fact, it runs the risk of alienating potential alliances by activating the growth frame and therefore reinforcing the pro-growth ideology.

Raworth suggests other words might better capture the broad intentions of the degrowth movement. She offers Ubuntu and Buen Vivir as examples. Kallis defends degrowth as the right word because capitalism cannot co-opt it. He later addresses concerns of co-option of degrowth anti-immigration and austerity agendas as being improbable and unlikely. Kallis responds to Raworth by saying:

> Buen vivir sounds great. Who wouldn't like to 'live well'? And indeed Latin Americans took it at heart: the Brazil-Ecuador inter-Amazonian highway with implanted 'creative cities' in-between; Bolivia's nuclear power programme; and a credit card in Venezuela. All in the name of 'buen vivir'. Which reminds me of 'Ubuntu Cola'. No one would build a highway, a nuclear reactor, issue more credit or sell colas in the name of degrowth. (2015)

In this passage, he obscures agency from the groups as he does not refer to Ubuntu or Buen Vivir as social movements made up of actors much like degrowth is. He does not associate the struggle of these groups as a shared struggle that degrowth has. His use of scare quotes may indicate a sense of distance (not solidarity) between him a degrowther and these movements. One can even read contempt, for not just the agents for doing the co-opting, but the movements for being co-opt*able*. However, in the passage before he refers to 'we' when describing the "vibrant community" of degrowthers that share experiences and ideas. More so in a later passage, he does associate himself and degrowth with the collective we of "Southerners at heart".

It is incongruent that in defence of the word degrowth Kallis has both assumed a joint alliance with people in the South and also distanced degrowth from movements in Latin America and Southern Africa. Kallis' attitude towards affiliate groups is incongruent with many groups in the movement which claim that "The kind of degrowth we want is one where a plurality of worldviews can thrive. Degrowth does not aim to be a totalising ideology" (Deschner and Hurst 2018). groups find meaning and also that they wish to not push an agenda in 'developing' nations.

Post-growth and degrowth advocates claim to share some of the core themes as Ubuntu in Southern Africa and Buen Vivir in South America (Raworth 2015; Smith, SUM 2019). They assume a natural alliance with Environmental Justice movements in the Global South as they have common interests and mutual opponents. However, Rodriguez-Labajos et al. (2019) find that degrowth is problematic for environmental justice movements in many regions of the Global South. They found degrowth to be a seldomly used and unappealing term in that it is reminiscent of austerity and portrays a different experience of poverty and scarcity to the realities of the marginalised or poor. It is counter-intuitive to frame the movement in terms of growth as for one there are positive connotations of growth, living well and working hard and for another, it legitimises the 'opponent' growth by denying it. Some activist leaders in the South felt degrowth is not radical enough in its ideology and language, which fails to move the discourse or include concepts such as re-commoning, eco-socialism and nature-centred perspectives (Brownhill, Turner, and Kaara 2012; Dengler and Seebacher 2019; Rodríguez-Labajos et al. 2019).

Dengler and Seebacher (2019) argue from a feminist decolonial perspective that there are colonial underpinnings to the degrowth movement. Specifically, there is still little consideration or negotiation of what adverse effects a change to the capitalist system in the North would have on the South. Additionally, that "Degrowth reproduces longstanding (neo-) colonial asymmetries by (once again!) setting the agenda on what ought to be done to solve problems of global relevance in the Global North" (248). Consider again how war metaphors might evoke connotations of violence, oppression, cultural genocide, *not* solidarity. Furthermore, they found degrowth to be anthropocentric, individualistic and Eurocentric with a focus on western and high-income countries. To the credit of degrowthers, though there is not a common position on economic growth in the South, there is broad consensus to not "impose Northern idea(l)s to the Global South" (Dengler and Seebacher 2019, 248). Nonetheless, degrowth risks undermining multi-cultural meanings and flourishing local initiatives with generic and standardised principles.

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I will again emphasise that degrowth is made up of different strands. It would be inaccurate to suggest that all degrowthers hold the views portrayed above. At other times movement advocates promote social values and advocate for what is to be gained in a post-growth society (I will speak to this more in a later section). Nonetheless, there is something unique to the degrowth discourse, and the degrowth paradigm shift is made visible through such utterances. Actors from potential alliance groups do not share the idea that it is good to be radical, evocative or shocking. "What's going to happen is that you're just going to create a divide, and that's not going to solve it" (van den Bergh, UoB 2017). Degrowth is divisive; it aims to be provocative. Conflict is not a problem degrowthers have or seem to want to avoid even though at times they are creating a conflict with the wrong sorts of people — potential alliances.

To summarise, almost all actors agree that GDP growth is an unsuitable measure of societal functioning. Despite the clear differences in their ideological standpoints actors in the corpus agree on a surprising amount. At first glance, I understood the shared agreements to mean that degrowthers are unnecessarily negative in their framing. Critiques of degrowth persuaded me that the movement is too radical to contrarian to be of any practical use. However, as my analysis continued, I became dubious that an amiable discourse would be sufficient. Indeed, green signifiers have

been co-opted before, and agreement should not quickly be assumed to be a sign that the limits to growth are becoming mainstream. "[S]hared understanding and agreement cannot foster the kind of counter-hegemonic politics we require to challenge neoliberalization" (Purcell 2009, 152). The growth paradigm is deeply seated and entwined with neoliberal and colonial ideologies (Schmelzer 2015). Perhaps then "we cannot afford to be agnostic" (Kallis 2015).

I have argued for and against the degrowth framing to mirror the framing dispute between discourses in green political economy. Actors disagree about how to frame their proposal for a sustainable relationship between environment, society and economy. Paradoxically, negative-framing can read as alluring to some but unappealing to others outside the discourse of the movement. On the one hand, the radical rhetorical and ideological resistance degrowth offers a tonic to the optimistic spin of green growth. Degrowthers are capable of defending their choice of negative framing. They claim it protects the movement from being co-opted or from being diluted by the interests of people and groups that favour of an easy solution. On the other, the negative framing may be incongruent with and a distraction from the movement's vision for socio-ecologic betterment. Degrowth's sources of bioeconomics, democracy, prosperity and well-being are not able to cut through the anti-growth frame which triggers in the receivers figured world visions of misery, austerity and recession.

Granted, it is unreasonable to assume that a movement can capture everyone. However, movement actors should be aware of how their framing risks alienating potential allies, political actors and movement participants. The movement is not well understood, and movement is already a niche that exists on the fringes of the mainstream. Thus, I would invite movement intellects in positions of influence to seriously (re)consider and reflect upon the appropriateness of their framing for each setting and audience.

5.2   Discourse incongruity — framing conflicts and contradictions

Raworth and van den Bergh point out that if so much time is needed to explain what is meant by degrowth then the word is not working.

> Because when you find yourself continually having to explain the basics and clear up repeated misunderstandings, it means there is something wrong with the way the ideas are being presented. Believe me, the answer is in the name. It's time for a new frame. (Raworth 2015)

In the next section, I will provide a further examination of the (sometimes deliberate) misunderstandings and disagreements between the actors that are observable in these texts. It will not be an exhaustive list. However, this examination serves as an entry point to explore the dilemma of incongruity that degrowth and its proponent's face (which will be further developed in Section 6.2). I will first examine how the misunderstanding that degrowth is about declining GDP linked to negative framing about the economy. Next, the use of climate and catastrophe framing, I will argue, does a disservice to the multidimensional and intersectional issues degrowth claims to address that green growth does not. Finally, I will illustrate how consumption, a necessary albeit contentious topic, can lead to futile debate. I illuminate how a more fruitful conversation was pursued by degrowth proponents when they talk-back against the hegemonic framing and counter-frame the debate.

5.2.1   It's (not about) the economy, stupid

Anti-growth framing creates a dilemma for proponents of degrowth because it leads people to believe that the goal of degrowth is to reduce and slow the global economy. Degrowth actors continuously have to correct that degrowth is an inevitable outcome of genuine decarbonisation and sustainability — not the goal itself. It is the means; not the ends (Jakob and Edenhofer 2014). For example, the following quote came in the concluding remarks when a moderator asked for a self-critique and explanation of the main challenge their ideas face. Kallis says:

> Again, the point of the degrowth is not that we should reduce the GDP. It's that having made this diagnosis — that if we are a cleaner economy, a fair economy, a more just economy — it's going to be also a smaller economy. How do we make this possible? So it's not going for the smaller economy. It's realising that that's inevitable and thinking how do we make this be maintained, wellbeing at the same time, how to make this fair? (UoB 2017)

In my opinion, this is one of the most precise explanations of degrowth that Kallis gives in this debate. Interestingly, it was the only time he mentions the social values that would be preferred in the transition to a hypothetical future. Instead, in this text Kallis defends degrowth and the logic that leads the movement to a diagnosis and

attacks the other argument. This centres about the things that degrowth *is not* — the things degrowth is against. However, in the excerpt above, Kallis repeatedly frames his argument in terms of *the economy*. Clean, fair and just (which are not necessarily anti-growth values) are used as adjectives of secondary importance to the economy. Growth based economics (such as neoliberal and capitalist economics) have become hegemonic and analogous with the entire field of economics in public discourse.[31] So using framing that centres the economy, by extension centres growth. He misses an opportunity to counter-frame the hegemonic pro-growth ideas about the economy should be. *Only* talking-back at pro-growth and a-growth logic leaves very little time to assert degrowth values, re-order an understanding of the issues, and narrate an alternative vision for prosperous more just future.

In contrast, the very names *post-growth* and *a-growth* make it more explicit that proponents are interested in thinking beyond growth or are agnostic to it. Respectivley, Jackson and van den Bergh argue for alternative measures of growth, qualitative measures of human flourishing, prosperity for example. "My emphasis is not so much on 'without growth' as 'prosperity without growth'. I look to tease apart prosperity and growth and say that they are different" (Jackson, Post-Growth Conference 2018). Kallis still takes issue with qualitative growth. He explains at the Post-Growth Conference (2018) that the notion of growth is ideological, whether it is quantitative or qualitative, it is "not innately human. […] This idea of perpetual expansion, which comes from economics, has infiltrated our subconscious." Similarly, Victor says: "So the degrowth message is just don't pay so much attention to GDP. […] Degrowth is all about challenging the growth paradigm, which means challenging the priority that's given to the pursuit of economic growth even in the richest of countries" (The Real News 2016).

Indeed, a great deal of priority is given to clarifying the vague terms, growth and degrowth. Doing so comes at the expense of describing what life beyond growth entails. Jackson demonstrates how it is possible to talk back in a typical abstract

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[31] A concern some actors attempt to address through their work is the lack of plurality and neglect of ecological systems in economics (as taught in schools, universitites and depicted in the mainstream). Namely, *Rethinking Economics* member Tone Smit (Rethinking Economics 2020) and *Doughnut Economics* author Kate Raworth (Raworth 2014)

discussion growth *and* counter-frame the standard economic speak in an economic forum. Jackson's concluding words were:

> I would simply appeal, I suppose, to an imperative to create some of the institutions that protect our social values and our ecological values; the quality of society itself, the distribution of resources between rich and poor; what it means to have a kind of more contemplative spiritual life rather than a material one. (ZEIT Wirtschaftsforum 2018)

His use of "our" makes some assumptions regarding the universality of quality of life and society, spirituality and values. However, he establishes common values and implies that economies do not have to operate as they do, which breaks from standard practice in economic discourses. By doing so, he counter-frames the debate without mentioning the economy, GDP or growth at all. I suggest that doing so is productive for Jackson's aims to argue that post-growth is a better alternative than continued (greened) growth. In sum, degrowth framing is reliant on resisting hegemonic ideology that the economy must grow but because the economy has become synonymous with growth centring an argument around the economy reinforces the growth frame. Alternatively, actors can subvert the dominant growth paradigm by counter-framing arguments about the economy in terms of shared values.

5.2.2   The climate emergency frame — who's it good for?

Green growth is criticised for its narrow conception of environmental and social issues and advocating for low-carbon transition through what is already conceivable through market reform policy and technological innovation (Bina and La Camera 2011; Grunwald 2018; Sandberg, Klockars, and Wilén 2019). Green growth, as a hegemonic discourse, has the agenda-setting power to frame the debate on economic growth. Despite how politically salient the green growth story is (in international policy and finance), the discourse is inadequately framed to address ecological and social crisis adequately. Green growth proponents, in the corpus and literature, tend to prioritise the climate crisis frame when arguing for the aptness of continued greened economic growth. In contrast, those who oppose the pro-growth arguments cast a wider net of concerns. For example, democracy, inequality and environmental degradation. "The debate about degrowth is not just about climate change" (Kallis, UoB 2017).

Pollin claims that climate stabilisation, green jobs and equitable distribution without austerity measures are "imminently achievable" through green growth (The Real News 2016). Victor criticises the idea that green growth can sufficiently live up to its claims and do so with a modest disruption saying:

> But it's only modest because you're only looking at climate change. Unless you have a green agenda that addresses the full slate of environmental issues, then it's a very partial analysis that I think is, it's not sufficient. It's not enough. And I think that you start looking at what it's going to cost in terms of investment to deal with the other kinds of environmental problems — loss of biodiversity being a classic one, there's no simple solution to that. It won't be dealt with through adoption of a few off-the-shelf technologies. When you start looking at what it's got to do to an economy to wrestle those problems to the ground, then I think you end up with a different conclusion. (The Real News 2016)

Despite, their more comprehensive set of concerns, in both the literature and corpus degrowth is often discussed in terms of a response to the climate crisis. The words *emissions, energy, carbon* and *climate* are some of the most frequently occurring in the transcripts of *both* pro-growth proponents and those from heterodox discourses. As such, their discussions are often centred to some extent around responding to climate change and decarbonising the economy. Even when actors had the chance to speak first on a topic or in a debate, some missed the opportunity to establish terms of the debate that strategically advantage their argument for large scale transformation of society (not just action on climate change). To demonstrate, Kallis at UoB and Anderson at UoM both chose to use climate and more specifically climate catastrophe framing even though the contexts were not specific to climate change (the debate topics were is capitalism unsustainable and a- vs degrowth). Both actors were the first to speak and had the opportunity to establish the frame for discussion. Neither were prompted by the moderator to address the topic of climate.

I respect that it is necessary to talk about climate change, and that Anderson, in particular, has the interest to do so (he is an energy and climate professor). However, I propose that it is not advantageous to do so at great length and detail when the forum does not explicitly call for it. The result of a narrow climate focus and framing can sideline the broader social and environmental concerns degrowth claims to be able to address. Moreover, it gives green growth arguments an advantage. To argue this point, I will recount a point raised by Sachs Olsen. She reflects on the language of emergency used among the panellists and in public discourse:

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> There's something about the language around emergency. It's important to call the climate crisis an emergency but also to be aware of how the language of emergency and the fact that we don't have time can also be used to control and justify some measures that are not necessarily — to actually oversimplify things. And I think this we need to be aware that the language of emergency is great because it enables a transformation and a desire for change. But at the same time we should not use that as a way to justify that other emergencies are less relevant. (SUM 2019)

Her point echoes two critiques of the degrowth discourse in the literature. One that the discourse of urgency risks inviting an authoritarian interpretation to the movement in which there is already a small patriarchal and nationalist current (Dengler and Seebacher 2019). The other relates to intersectionality. Degrowth in Europe or the Global North more generally may prioritise climate change as the most impending crisis to date. However, in other regions, land enclosures and income insecurity, for example, are more pressing issues (Brownhill, Turner, and Kaara 2012; Rodríguez-Labajos et al. 2019). Degrowth actors do not explicitly mention these intersectional issues experienced in broader geographical contexts.

Taking advantage of the global relevance and urgency of the crisis may seem beneficial to justify a degrowth transition based on the argument that absolute decoupling is not possible. However, paradoxically an argument framed by climate change also perhaps works to the advantage of green growth actors whose arguments are supported by the hegemonic assumption that decoupling is possible and already achieved in the Nordics (Stoknes and Rockström 2018). The conversation becomes about the suitability of green growth to respond to climate change disconnected from intersectional issues. Opponents of degrowth take advantage of the modest scope of concern. Simultaneously they position continued economic growth as an appropriate response to climate change and make the call to voluntarily shrink the economy seem too extreme and even unnecessary.

It is necessary that in debates, proponents of degrowth, if not equally, prioritise other issues. Perhaps, they omit such issues because they are not thought of as relevant or of interest for western audiences. However, Jacobs to recognises that green growth is climate centric and needs to broaden its focus. He says, "I'm in favour of renewable energy and climate change policy and I agree we have to do all that. […] We need to focus on decarbonisation, environmental goods, well-being social institution, social

solidarity, collectivism, rebuilding community, rebuilding a sense of democratic control of the economy." (PEC 2018b).

In each text, there is only so much time to discuss the issues at hand. Persistent and narrow climate framing disconnects the broader scope of degrowth's concerns from the conversations. Such framing excludes from the conversation issues, including social injustices, inequalities, environmental degradation, among other intersectional issues. Degrowth actors undermine their own proposition when they privilege climate change framing and by extension, the already hegemonic, modest and seemingly appropriate green growth proposal. They miss out on the opportunity to reframe the issues and justify the limits to growth and make a case for more radical transformation. Opponents of degrowth can then argue that flattening growth and a radical reorganisation of society is too massive and difficult to bring about in the short amount of time there is to deal with the urgent climate issue. For example, Jacobs says: "The core of my argument about degrowth and green growth comes to the feasibility of doing these things in the world we live in, because we have not got long (PEC 2018b). In sum, in the context of the debates and panels examined here, framing the debate in terms of urgent action on climate change benefits green growth as the more swift response and disadvantages the degrowth argument.

5.2.3   Consumption — curbing a counterproductive topic

Green growth is criticised for failing to address issues of production and consumption as a source of social inequality, resource and land depletion and emissions (Jakob and Edenhofer 2014). However, degrowthers do not have a unified stance on the issue of consumption and production, particularly disparity between wealthy and poorer nations (Dengler and Seebacher 2019, 248). In these texts, the topic was approached with caution saying little of any practical nature about what 'poor' nations can do. Degrowth is an excellent antidote to overconsumption, but the movement is near silent on the parallel concepts of re-commoning and social welfare (Brownhill, Turner, and Kaara 2012; Jakob and Edenhofer 2014). Similar to the degrowth movement in Europe, commoning movements in the Middle East and Africa address the issue of alienation from land enclosure and production processes (Brownhill, Turner, and

Kaara 2012).[32] They mobilise both waged and unwaged people who are exploited and dispossessed (97).

It could be that there is a strategic silence on the part of degrowthers.he topic of sovereignty is not broached in the texts and is scarce in degrowth scholarship. Instead, from a Eurocentric focus, how individuals might need to change their lifestyles, to consume less or differently is approached in several ways in the corpus. What business do elite actors predominantly from Europe and North America have telling the rest of the world how to degrow? I will illustrate now that a perceived silence on an issue or incoherent argument can be interpreted differently.

At UoM (PEC 2018a) Scott-Cato and Anderson discuss overconsumption Anderson's pacing and tone express anger and frustration. Anderson makes firm, radical demands that elites and over-developed nations must "stop material consumption" and "no more academics flying". Perhaps to the detriment of the efforts the movement makes to disassociate degrowth from recession he says: "That's exactly what I want to bring about — austerity and recession and reduction material consumption by those of us who have abused the system for the last 30 to 50 years". Anderson attributes blame to elite groups of individuals in positions of influence (which he includes himself and peers academic in). He says "we have tried to make, think to ourselves and convince other people that was something special about us that should allow us, this particular small group to consume hugely". To this Scott-Cato agrees, "all the other people are completely oblivious to fact that actually they'll sit there talking about climate change and then they'll fly all the time. So, there's mass rank hypocrisy and like irritates me like it irritates you".

According to a fellow panellist, Anderson is unfairly singling out and "picking on" academics. The excerpt above observes how the topic of consumption can become an individualised and impassable struggle between peers (I will return to the standards intellectual advocates are held to in the following chapter). Moreover, it mirrors the very spat between research peers that motivated my research topic (the accusations that green growth is sociopathic). Scott-Cato is irritated, but Anderson is audibly angered and enacts a particularly polarising position. From a place of frustration

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[32] Similar to the framing of *de*growth, Brownhill et al. (2012) suggest *de-alienation* as a term to addresses challenges such as unjust land enclosures and production processes.

concern, .he enacts fighting speak and attacks his peers. Undoubtedly, the points they raise are important. However, the manner in which they discussed overconsumption (armed with a hammer and surrounded by nails) is worthy of exploration.

When considering what else the actors had to say about (over) consumption, I observed that some actors fall silent the topic. Victor, in advocating for slow/degrowth backtracks when the moderator raises reducing consumption: "I don't think I ever said reducing consumption. It's quite interesting that comes up. I'd prefer to, I'll come back to that…" (The Real News 2016). He does not come back to it and is flustered by the question. The issue of lifestyle change and disparity of material consumption between countries and income groups is thus avoided. I understood this to mean that he was avoiding the topic.

Extending this examination further, Smith opens the panel by reaffirming that degrowth movement is about much more than reducing economic growth or material consumption. To paraphrase: "It's not about only changing our consumption level, but also really re-programming our mind, and not thinking in quantities all the time. We want to talk about sufficiency instead. Not that something always has to increase" (SUM 2019). In agreeance, Sachs Olson also resists talking too much about consumption as it risks entrenching "the capitalist way of putting the focus on the individual and so on individual blame" (SUM 2019). Both actors demonstrate intentionality by resisting to focus on consumption. Thus, they escape the trap Anderson and Scott-Cato fall into, and Victor avoids. Instead, they can talk about degrowth under the frame of sufficiency, wellbeing and the commons. They are in a position of being affirmative (rather than negative as illustrated in the previous two examples of climate and economic framing.) Thus, counter-framing can strategically divert conversations towards more fertile ground.

Jackson provides another example of counter framing. Rather than avoiding or attacking the issue of consumption Jackson counter-frames Folkerts-Landau who takes issue with post-growth and the idea of being told: "don't go buy more stuff". At the ZEIT Wirtschaftsforum the head of the Deuch Bank points to his summer house, second iPhone and toys for kids and says "if you start preventing us from doing those small things we like to buy even though they're probably not socially useful you may do real damage to the innovative process." Jackson responds by first addressing that

"different organisation of society would demonise innovation [...] innovation itself is in the spirit of human beings, it's in the heart of society. That's not something that we have to give up or throw away." He goes on challenge Folkerts-Landaus talk of the individual's right to consume by reframing their disagreement in new terms in terms. Quality of life, self-fulfillment and creativity of which innovation is a part:

> I think that to me brings the most important misunderstanding of this of all, is that we have equated GDP growth material growth and the accumulation of stuff with the idea of prosperity. Any informed understanding of what prosperity is within human beings immediately gives the light of that we are not simply acquisitive, selfish, individualistic, hedonistic consumers. There are other parts to our life, and they are getting trashed by an obsession with growth. (Jackson, ZEIT Wirtschaftsforum 2018)

The above excerpt illustrates that actors can counter-frame the dominant ideologies that are raised in the debate on economic growth. It is possible to shift from a negative frame (lower growth will take away your rights and comforts) to a positive one (increased time, freedoms and creativity). Counter-frames serves the function of "narrative repair" (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2011, 66) as it enables actors to speak affirmatively about post- and degrowth. As such, they have the ability to reorientate an understanding of what the movements *are* (rather than what they are not). Moreover, they can reprioritise the issues and values and so set alternative terms of the debate. It may be the case that when the actors are silent on the topic of consumption, it is because they are avoiding a contentious topic or do not have a coherent argument prepared. However, reframing should not be misinterpreted as silence or incoherence but as a strategic discursive resource (Benford and Snow 2000)

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Poet and activist Audre Lord has said the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1984, 101). It is fitting to consider that frames, metaphors and other discursive strategies as tools. Tools to talk about complex multidimensional social, economic and environmental problems and tell stories about alternative solutions. Adhering to standard tools of the hegemonic pro-growth discourse is incongruent with the goal of deprogramming the growth paradigm (and its associated ideologies) from green political economic thought and practice.

The preceding sections have examined how the use of master frames — growth, climate urgency and Eurocentric conception — can be unfortunate for degrowth actors.

The use of master frames does not necessarily serve actors to set the debates and discussions in terms of post- or degrowth interests and values. Bruner and Oelschlaenger (1994, 391) argue that "whoever defines the terms of the public debate determines its outcomes". Thus, whether a pro-growth actor is present in the text, or not, hegemonic pro-green growth discourses overdetermine the outcome of the debate. When degrowth proponents adhere to powerful hegemonic framing discourses, they miss the chance to determine the outcome of the debate right from the start (Bruner and Oelschaenger 1994). In an attempt to make their arguments clearer when they are misunderstood, the tendency to draw from economic and scientific arguments (and their framing) may make matters worse. Some actors would offer more robust methodological arguments and impassioned conversations which result in an ideological impasse all the same. Thus, framing incongruity is one contributing factor to why the degrowth argument is misunderstood and remains marginal.

As an alternative to using hegemonic framing in the debate on economic growth, some actors in the corpus (for example Smith, Sachs Olsen, Jackson) would creatively counter-frame the conversation. Thus, they resist master frames and setting alternative terms for debate that favour of the post- and degrowth vision. Chapter 6 will take a closer look at how socially situated identities have a role to play in constrained and enabled the discourses enacted by intellectual advocates.

5.3   Recapitulation

I have explored several examples of the arguments between proponents of degrowth and their movement allies and opponents. I have identified a number of ways in which the framing used by actors in their boundary work undermine their vision or compound misunderstandings about the degrowth proposal. The examination of the texts presented in this chapter is not intended to assume that movements discourse must be coherent or its actors and coalitions unified in order to succeed. Movement framings are often contested, and even mainstream economists disagree and argue (Benford and Snow 2000; McCloskey 1998). There are advantages to discourse incoherence. The political power of a discourse comes not from its consistency, but from its multi-interpretability (Hajer 1995, 61) Variety, fragmentation and malleability in environmentalism, for example, are favourable over consistency and purity which holds environmentalism in the margins of society (Anderson 2010).

Some scholars in degrowth literature argue that it is important not to prescribe a one size fits all approach to a democratic and prosperous way down — that it is especially important to allow for localised and culturally specific meanings to be made. "Degrowth is rich in its meanings and does not embrace one single philosophical current" (Demaria et al. 2013, 195). This would naturally lead to heterogeneity in degrowth meaning and discourse. The very fact that debates and panel discussions between proponents of various anti-growth or growth-agnostic actors exist demonstrates heterogeneity. Diversity and provocation have their merits as argued for by decolonial and feminist scholars. Indeed, the breadth and robustness of the degrowth proposal is a part of the charm that drew me to be curious about it in the first place. However, it must be acknowledged that the degrowth actors in these texts do not represent the full diversity that much of degrowth literature and the movement proponents claim to include. None are from the global south or represent the practical grassroots degrowth projects, nor do they dwell on intertextual references to these groups or ideas. Why this is, I will postulate in the next Chapter.

Demaria et al., (2013, 197) say "Degrowth is thus a way to bring forward a new imaginary which implies a change of culture and a rediscovery of human identity which is disentangled from economic representations". In their published work To this Kallis, Jackson and Raworth, among others broadly agree. Imaginaries need to be changed, well-being and the good life need to be redefined and new ideas popularised. The preceding exploration aids degrowth actors and us to see that there are several ways in which their choice of rhetoric and framing may not be the reimagining, rediscovering or disentangling as one may hope. Many positive elements of degrowth are overshadowed by dominant narratives of avoiding recession, acting with urgency, top-down policy change and progress at all costs. Some actors in these texts unwittingly reinforce the same framing as hegemonic growth discourse. As such, they struggle to create new narratives without conforming to the master frames they seek to decenter. Moreover, the negative framing of degrowth marginalises their movement as one that is an indictment on growth without any practical, problem-solving potential.

An awareness of rhetoric — the metaphors used, framing and counter-framing processes, reception from audiences within and outside the movement — can lead actors within the movement to recognise the need to develop alternative messages.

Moreover, an honest recognition of the shortcomings of their arguments may prevent the movement from becoming put aside as an unrealistic thought experiment; stereotyped as a doomsayers cult (Folkerts-Landau, ZEIT Wirtschaftsforum 2018); or fetishised as another westernised, middle-class, good-life movement (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010; Rodríguez-Labajos et al. 2019).

However, disagreement within the degrowth movement and between its discourse coalitions is not enough to dismantle a movement or an intellectual paradigm. In fact, disagreements are fruitful in that it keeps good academic debate churning (McCloskey 1998) and forces movement actors to develop their arguments (Billig 1995). The incongruent discourse enacted by degrowth advocates and actors in their coalition cannot sufficiently explain why the degrowth movement and its vision for a post-growth transition remain marginal. Next, the relational concept of collective identity will be examined. How can those outside of the movement challenge the legitimacy of movement advocates can to help us make sense of the marginality of the discourse.

6   Do degrowthers have an identity dilemma?

I have conceptualised Degrowth as a movement and situated it among its discourse coalitions. Groups within the movement, and their heterodox coalitions, are bound together by a common concern — to critique the hegemonic and unsustainable limitless growth ideology. They are, however, not unified. Kallis comments that the fragmentation of the movement is a positive attribute, saying that "The creative aspect of the degrowth community is this contradictory tension between a radical critique of economic reasoning and at the same time a willingness to engage with economic models and propose policies" (Post-Growth Conference 2018).

To explore this contradictory tension, I have applied the relational concept of collective identity to my analysis. Collective identity has utility for theorising the collective action of social movements. It aids an exploration of how discourses and specifically socially situated identities of degrowth advocates are constructed by the movement and those outside of it. In this chapter, I will, first, explore how the two cultures of activism and academia that the intellectual advocates of the degrowth movement draw from. I will then problematise identity as a double-edged sword to explore how a strong shared identity binds social movement but also can be dangerous as it isolates them from discourse coalitions and can compromise potential alliances. I will use the concept of *tightrope talk* to conceptualise the difficulty and creativity actors have, as they straddle both cultures when making their case for degrowth.

6.1   Two cultures

As the movement is still niche, the small pool of movement advocates operates in multiple discursive arenas. Academic-activists are tasked with speaking in academic, public and activist arenas and enact social languages suitable for economists (and the dialect of ecological economics), social justice, climate science and so on. Tightrope talkers find themselves in a precarious situation — keeping their "internal rhetoric" pure and unco-optable, and "external rhetoric" persuasive and credible (Luks 1998). Internal rhetoric is used among those within a discourse — how degrowthers talk to each other, ecological economists, and experts on sustainable transformation. External

rhetoric then relates to communication with the public and politicians or those on the other side of a discourse (Luks 1998). The two of course overlap, especially in the boundary work of the degrowth movement advocates. In other words, in forums such as these that are both internal debates with other green political economy scholars and public-facing platforms. They face the risk that they may not be well received by either their peers from normal sciences or their heterodox alliances from the Global South or radical strands of the movement.

In this section, I illustrate how degrowthers draw from two cultures and mix internal and external rhetoric in their boundary work. I will demonstrate that collective identity (particularly in the absence of formal organsations and institutions) can be used strategically distinguish a group of movement actors from other movements or to assert their ideas so that the hegemonic ideology is not seen to be the only, natural way (Jasper and McGarry 2015). In this way, it is strategic for degrowth movement intellects to enact a deviant identity to challenge and resist the hegemon so that the hegemonic pro-growth actors cannot deny or co-opt. It is also strategic that in their intellectual advocacy, degrowthers credentialise themselves so that they and their arguments are perceived as legitimate by their audiences and opponents (Benford and Snow 2000, 620).

6.1.1   Deviant activists

Degrowth, is heterogeneous and consistently framed in opposition to the hegemonic growth paradigm by both proponents and opponents of the post-growth vision. The movement exists, in part, to challenge the dominant growth paradigm. Entangled in that paradigm are common values of being positive and being agreeable, which degrowth proponents also resist. Kallis for example mocks the mentality of agreeable and positive associates from outside of the movement actors by saying:

> Know this feeling 'what am I doing with these people in the same room'? Hearing the words 'win-win' and looking at graphs where society, environment and economy embrace one another in loving triangles as markets internalize 'externalities' (sic)? (Kallis 2015)

Might this and Anderson's call for austerity be performative? Perhaps yes, but to understand what degrowthers mean and why they would say this, I extended the

analysis further to the following extract from a blog post from two PhD candidates and degrowth advocates:

> Here's what degrowth naysayers don't seem to get: degrowth is actually punk as fuck. We're nonconforming, anti-establishment, DIY punks. And we're not trying to sound nice. Take your positivity and shove it. (Vansintjan and Bliss 2016)

The authors say it plainly — degrowth does not aim to be likeable or palatable. When I reflect on my moments of degrowth naysaying, it becomes apparent perhaps other actors in the corpus, and I have not always understood or valued that the movement is well aware and intentional in their negative framing. Punks, by virtue of being a subculture, may not necessarily want to achieve cultural domination or become hegemonic. It may be that pragmatism is not the goal of the movement at all. Instead, the movement (or groups within it) may be best suited to the goal decentring growth from mainstream discourses and thus shifting them in the direction of a post-growth values (Bollier and Conaty 2014). While alongside a broad coalition of heterodox coalitions and movements tackle policy influence (Buch-Hansen 2018).

Punks may not characterise all of the degrowth movement spectra. Not all currents are anti-establishment, anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist, and anti-cooperation. The language and practice of degrowth punk most strongly correlate with the "eco-radical sufficiency oriented critics of civilization" group within the degrowth movement (Eversberg and Schmelzer 2018). They are the most homogenous group within degrowth, so this attitude could be regarded as a niche subculture that does not endeavour to create extensive societal change at all. However, in the corpus, all actors across the spectrum of degrowth perspectives use a counter-discourse to some extent. Not only do degrowthers enact *deviance* in their language and practice as they reject the dominant growth paradigm.[33] They also challenge the assumption that a movement must be positive and unified to effect change.

The sentiment that degrowth is a form of resistance that aims to cause conflict, entice debate and antagonise of agents of green growth was not held by all the heterodox

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[33] For institutions in the Anthropocene Era, where constant change and heterogeneity is common Hoffman and Jennings (2015, 18) posit that "deviance" in language and practice has become the norm as a result of increased hybridisation, reflexivity and retheorisation. Youth climate activism has also been categorised on a spectrum of "dutiful, disruptive or dangerous" (O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward 2018).

actors in this corpus. Victor and Anderson, each enacted nonconformity and deviance in language and practice similarly to actors that identified with degrowth. While, Raworth and van den Bergh, criticised degrowth for being provocative and asked that the movement become more agreeable.

It should not be dismissed that a punk group within the movement exists and contributes to the internal rhetoric and experience of the movement (and perhaps even its heterodox coalitions). In the absence of institutional infrastructure and movement organisations (only research groups and community projects), social movements rely on shared stories and identities as a resource to establish network ties, promoting and mobilising people to the movement. (Dryzek 2013; Polletta and Japer 2001, 291).Moreover, from outside the movement, the punk group identity becomes associated with the whole movement. The small but noticeable punk identity contributes to the impression that degrowth is not a serious proposal that genuinely aims to become institutionalised, offer policy ideas or mainstream eco-sufficiency lifestyles.

Performances of identity (for example, internal activism rhetoric) are socially situated but there are nonetheless political implications for a shared internal rhetoric and identity is received in other contexts (for example the scientific and economic contexts degrowth advocates debate in). (Giddens 1991, 58). Kallis explicitly describes what it feels like to belong to the movement, and thus, how the shared activist identity works as a cultural resource. At the Post-Growth Conference (2018) he says "At the degrowth conferences, I see energy and new people — both researchers and activists". On the Oxfam blog he also says: "There is a vibrant community and this is an irreversible fact... If you experience this incredible energy, you find that degrowth is a beautiful word". He says that his community of 20-30 people frequently gather to socialise, talk, protest; "passions run high" and "we disagree in almost everything other than that degrowth brings us together." He describes a lively community that fosters a palpable sense of shared identity that is bound not by sterile agreement or optimism but through a collective mission. However, Kallis also acknowledges that outside of specific contexts, their shared culture and identity is no longer a social good but a source of isolation and awkwardness. He also contrasts the "vibrant" feeling he gets from the degrowth community with an account of what it feels like to be the "awkward" and "odd" one out in a room for having unorthodox views. Not only on development and

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economic growth but also on the allure of not being so positive and seeking out consensus.

An essential element of fostering a collective identity, in group discourse, is differentiating the group from those outside of it (Melucci 1995). Degrowthers can distance themselves from the discourse coalitions that share their concerns, for example, other post-growth, transition and green political economy discourses. Kallis, also sets himself apart from the radical right and "even the greens" who adoption of sustainable development and ecological modernisation "led nowhere".

Moreover, some actors distance themselves from the word degrowth. Raworth, Anderson and Victor are supportive of degrowth (the idea) but all say they have difficulty with the word and avoid using it for their own advocacy (PEC 2018a; Raworth 2015; Real Talk 2016). In their saying so, they aid in the construction of what it is to be a degrowther and loosely define the boundaries of their shared identity. One can advocate for degrowth and still be unwilling to use the labelled.

Following this observation, it is again worth noting that in the corpus, not all degrowthers are activists (connoting protesters and campaigners). They are however, intellectual advocates and signifying agents. Anderson chastises his peers, the intellectual elite, arguing that they ought to use their position of influence to "speak truth to power" or practice intellectual advocacy. He scolds some of his peers who have been quiet on the issue of climate, flawed neoclassical growth models and "the equality dimension of all this". He says:

> I pick an academic because we have a particularly privileged position in society [...] We have stayed quiet as academics, we have been supine, we have been pliant, we have been party to maintaining the status quo. So I guess there were lots of other people we can criticise in society, but I think our job in society paid for by the public purse needs to have much greater on honesty and integrity. (PEC 2018a)

Moreover, Anderson stresses to his peers and audience that their debate is a moral one and warrants moral framing rather than continued discussions of "nonsense objectivity". His comments are emblematic of the role of scholars in PNS. He demonstrates how degrowth scholarship is activist-led and argues he and his peers have a position of influence that must be used for intellectual advocacy. He says:

> This is all about moralising. Climate change is a moral issue and there is no non-moralising approach. You can't have a non-moralising approach and so let us hold our morals, put out morals on our sleeve, and hold them up. This is what we stand for in various forms. So we need to bring morals to the fore it is not about two degrees centigrade, it's not about science or carbon budgets. It's about a moral framing that needs to be clear. (PEC 2018a)

Some actors also deviate from standard economic and scientific speak in these arenas. Sachs Olson and Smith were comfortable defending the utopian ideas that they and other degrowth proponents put forward. They said the movement wants to talk about sufficiency and be "reclaim" the language of climate emergency to include intersectionality rather than undermine other types of emergency (SUM 2019). From the post-growth perspective, Jackson and Raworth sought out alternative ways of framing the issues that frequently come up in the degrowth debate. They centre their arguments on well-being rhetoric and values-laden language. For example, Jackson's final words at the ZEIT Wirtschaftsforum spoke to social and ecological values, quality of life, redistribution and spiritual meaning in life.

In sum, degrowthers, in their intellectual advocacy, contend with the dominant pro-quantitative growth agents and deny that perpetual growth is a natural or inevitable state. They also enact a deviant and dissenting discourse that exemplifies the radical, unorthodox currents of the movement such as anti-establishment and anti-elite groups. The resistance of the hegemonic growth paradigm a cultural resource to the degrowth movement binds actors and groups while also serving to undermine the hegemonic growth ideology. Perceived by those within the movement, deviance is a heroic and necessary resource in their discourse. Outside of the movement, actors criticise that same resource for being too divisive. Recall van den Bergh saying "what's going to happen is that you're just going to create a divide, and that's not going to solve it" (UoB 2017).

6.1.2   Real economists

In addition to the radical activist movement, degrowth is also an intellectual paradigm and an emerging niche in the field of ecological economics. In this next section, I will explore how they are able to draw on standard economic and scientific discourse in their arguments on methodologies assessing climate and ecosystems, social metabolism, materialism and so on.

The degrowth debate often takes place in academic arenas. Several of the texts in the corpus took place in the setting of university lecture rooms, academic conferences and forums. It is not surprising that some of the speakers offer empirically-driven arguments laden with science-speak. It is an appropriate language for the setting and presumably for the audience too. Actors present theory, cases, data and modelling at each other and refer to their "hypothesis" or "diagnosis" in an attempt to sway their audience with evidence to prove their point or disprove the other (Anderson, PEC 2018a; Kallis, PEC 2018b; UoB 2017). To illustrate, Kallis presents a graph dense PowerPoint to make a case for degrowth and uses language such as "confirmed by the data", "quite strong evidence, theoretically backed that there is a relationship between the economy and carbon emissions" (PEC 2018b). In response, Jacobs defends green growth using Kallis' same slides and data to make an opposing argument. Jacobs thus undermines Kallis' reading of empirical material and also demonstrates that a data-driven argument has limitations in a normative and ideologically fueled debate.[34]

Many degrowthers and post-growthers base their arguments on the premise of ecological economics. They refer to evidence, fact, laws of physics and nature to credientialise their argument At the UoB debate, Kallis aligns degrowth with ecological economics and attempts to legitimise his argument by saying things like "we have a whole body of work" and that "in ecological economics, we are saying that the process is not some magic process of human capital or technology". He positions any non-ecological economists, unable to acknowledge the link between GDP and emissions, as believers of "magic". By this, he infers the pro-growth paradigm is theoretically flawed and its advocates misguided and irrational in their assumptions that dictate and dominate the present economic system. By aligning himself with a field of thinking and publishing ecological economist scholars, he attempts to establish credibility to 'break the spell' of green economic logic. Moreover, at the Post-Growth Conference (2018) he says, "I'm not the type of socialist who makes an abstract argument that…" In doing so, he differentiates between what he views as grounded, objective research from the abstracted and inferior work of others to defend his integrity and bolster his argument. Kallis also establishes degrowth as a legitimate perspective in green political economy, it also emphasises that he is not alone in his

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[34] The observation of Jacobs' stunt (making an opposing argument from one set of data) exemplifies the limitations of arguments based facts and rational argumentation through economic and climate modelling (McCalman and Connelly 2019).

thinking and belongs to a group of other scientists and (ecological) economists (us) contending with the growth ideology (them).

Through intertextuality most actors worked to credentialise themselves by mentioning on their own published work, referring to other publications or people likely to be deemed reputable by the audience (Hajer 1995). For example, actors might mention positive responses from conversations with policymakers from international governance bodies (van den Bergh, UoB 2017), or with high ranking people such as CEOs and CFOs (Folkerts-Landau, ZEIT Wirtschaftsforum 2018).

It is particularly necessary that degrowthers credentialise themselves as real economists because degrowth has established a reputation for being anti-economics. At the 2018 Post-Growth Conference, Kallis recalls the first degrowth conference where the movement was notably disenchanted with the work of economists. He acknowledges that while some groups feel disdain for all varieties of economic through, the wholesale rejection of economics is no longer prevalent today. To this he adds that "Of course, not everyone agrees with one another — some might think that economic models are reproducing the dominant way of thinking, others that they are useful for thinking practically about how to manage without growth." He positions the disagreement and diversity of ideas within the movement as a strength. Interestingly, economists also have diversity and disagreement (McCloskey 1983, 482), but as most do not challenge growth heterogeneity among economic schools is not perceived as a weakness that needs to be cleared up (as van den Bergh and Raworth suggested).

The above examination of the economic and scientific side of the degrowth identity illustrates how, in order to be persuasive, actors must work to be received as credible, acceptable and trustworthy (Hajer 1995, 59). By enacting the role of, for example, the 'real economists', performing in the 'right ways' with the 'right people' and knowing how to 'walk the walk and talk the talk' actors can be accepted in the social context (Gee 2011). And so they must — mainstream economists will seldom accept a style of discourse that they do not recognise immediately as 'scientific' (Luks 1998, 146). Consequently, degrowth actors, in these texts, can become regulated by hegemonic economic and scientific discourses and dissociate from the practical grassroots aspects of the movement. The impact of which will be explored as this chapter continues.

Disconnect from the movement

Despite claims in the literature that degrowth is as much a grassroots and activist movement as it is an intellectual paradigm, actors seldom refer to the practical actions and proposals in the movement. Even outside of the academic settings, the movement's practical efforts are not referred to. Instead, when referring to the degrowth community proponents typically use terms such as "ideas", "thoughts", "debates", and "minds". Moreover, actors talk about the intellectual expansion of the movement: "The younger minds that join the degrowth discussions are excited and bring fresh ideas. […] I take strength from the fact that we are producing more and better knowledge and are engaging more people in our research" (Kallis, Post-Growth Conference 2018).

Furthermore, the activist nature of the movement is not mentioned in the university lecture room debates. Kallis, for example, makes little to no mention of the activist movement which he, in other arenas, strongly identifies with nor does he mention the practical initiatives and policies. Social justice, food growing, rewilding, regenerative agriculture, post-extractivism, population are among many topics relevant to the process of degrowth that is not mentioned in any depth in the corpus. Despite their embrace of utopia, at the SUM panel transport, urban infrastructure, wealth distribution, democracy, consumption are only briefly touched upon. Grassroots projects, initiatives, trials and the like are not mentioned. For a science that claims to be an activist-led, why it is intellectual advocates silent on the pragmatic and grassroots elements of the movement in these social settings?

Before continuing, do the texts I have chosen over-represent the part of the degrowth discourse that is an intellectual paradigm? Yes, absolutely. The strong emphasis on theorising, thinking and discussing (rather than practical, community or policy-based action) confirms that the community of degrowth is (in part) an intellectual movement with a discourse that is socially situated in academia (Cosme, Santos, and O'Neill 2017; Weiss and Cattaneo 2017). However, as evidenced there is also an influential culture of radical, critical and oppositional detectable in the discourses enacted by degrowth actors. It is not certain if these silences and disconnections in the discourse are intentional or unconscious; a matter of preference, confidence or personal style (Gee 2011). However, we may be able to understand why core ideas and practical aspects are entirely silent in these talks by acknowledging that degrowthers are trying to perform as real economists and defend themselves against attempts to delegitimise them.

If degrowth is to be a grassroots and democratic process, then attention to what every-day degrowthers do, how they behave and what their communities look like should be part of the conversations actors are having. Moreover, how people outside the movement respond to and take up degrowth initiatives (without necessarily being labelled as such) should be observed. Interestingly, most actors only made use of other elites to credentialise themselves and their arguments. Only Scott-Cato (PEC 2018a) and Raworth (2015) share anecdotes about the success they have with their of a post-growth and green economy vision among laypeople and general audiences.

It is worth considering the theoretical and economic rhetoric of actors with a background in green political economy or ecological economics, is reproduced outside of academic discourse. Degrowth's internal rhetoric does not exist in a vacuum. It can be assumed that, to some extent, reproduced in the public realm and grassroots advocacy of the movement (McCalman and Connelly 2019). However, this assumption has not yet been addressed in peer-reviewed literature only undergraduate theses. There are a number of repercussions to the performance of degrowthers as real economists which I will go on to explore in throughout this chapter. The section that follows will observe the ways in which opponents and allies deny degrowth advocates of their identity and thus make their arguments seem not to be credible, acceptable or trustworthy. Following, which I will observe what actors do in response to this act of marginalisation.

6.1.3 Denying and affirming identities — a struggle for legitimacy

In the corpus, some degrowth actors spoke more to the intellectual paradigm and political project of degrowth than the social movement — which is to be expected given the context of the texts and the actors observed. Identities are socially situated in time and context (Gee 2001). Through the lens of collective identity, it is necessary also to consider how the movement (and its sub groups) is characterised by those outside of it (Holland, Fox, and Daro 2008). In this section, I further explore how the degrowth discourse is received by those outside of the movement. I will illustrate that the degrowth discourse is shaped by both a contradictory tension between these two cultures and how "social actors enter a conflict to affirm the identity that their opponent has denied them" (Melucci 1995, 48). In doing so, I will argue that there is a dilemma

for degrowth advocates regarding how the collective identity they construct affects the marginality of the degrowth movement.

There are a number of ways in which social movement collective identity processes can illuminate how the degrowth movement is marginalised by actors that are outside of the movement's discourse. I will present three ways in which degrowthers are made to look less legitimate by their opponents. These include undermining and trivialising degrowthers; questioning the validity of their assumptions and disassociating them from the field of economics.

First, the degrowth discourse makes use of nonconformity and dissent as a social good — a shared perspective of what is appropriate and necessary. In response, pro-growth actors work to trivialise their opponent's arguments and make them seem unscientific and untrustworthy. Kallis makes an intertextual reference to how degrowthers have been referred to as "collapse porn addicts" and proponents of a "cute" idea. Folkerts-Landau likens opponents to pro-growth ideology as "doomsdayers". Van den Bergh portrays degrowthers as a group with minimal impact and hidden, dubious agendas. "And of course degrowth has many other keywords. I mentioned some of them, I associate the growth with local activities, bottom up processes, informal activities that don't pay taxes, no profit activities, voluntary behaviour, communism in disguise" (UoB 2017).

It is notable that pro-growth speakers, who have the dominant ideology of growth on their side, tended to adopt a casual register. For example, Jacobs adopts colloquialisms and makes off-the-cuff remarks such as "fish or trees or *whatever*" and "the way in which we (pause) think we generate well-being in modern capitalist economies is pretty crap". Even van den Bergh, who is not pro-growth, is much lighter, almost jovial in his approach, jokes when asked what the main challenge to his a-growth approach is, says: "Well, I think my idea is good. (laughter) Sorry for that. So the proof in the pudding is that Giorgos agrees with it (laughter)."

Folkerts-Landau also implies groups affiliated with degrowth are not thinking and acting lucidly: "When I watch these debates from the Greens and the environmentalists, I say to myself, you know what are these guys smoking." In these ways, the actors mentioned above undermine the degrowth argument and its advocates by portraying to the audiences negative connotations that make degrowth seem futile

and corrupt. Despite the possible perception that these forums call for a more formal style, Jacobs, van den Bergh and Folkerts-Landau appear to be relaxed and confident in their argumentation.

The actors that aligned with hegemonic pro-growth arguments often adopt passivation and nominalisation techniques whereby they assert their view as a given reality or objective truth. It is a common rhetorical technique by economists and people in the sciences more generally (McCloskey 1998). For example, Jacobs at the PEC debate, says "this is [not] a question of choosing between neoclassical economics and ecological economics, that's a fact". Post-growth and degrowth proponents instead assert their arguments as one perspective held by a group, or a credible individual with empirical support. In these texts, they tended to modalise their statements more than the other speakers (from a-growth, green economics and green growth and pro-growth). Adding "almost", "quite strong" and "I think" modalises a statement which. Kallis says "I believe that this is *almost* a law". So while attempting to associate ecological economics rationalising with laws of thermodynamics and scientific truths, he also modalises his claim.

I sense that degrowthers take the opportunity to talk and debate in these forums very seriously and this comes across in their style. Their tone carries concern and even distress as they counter-argue opponents, who comparatively seem almost indifferent to the consequences of the issues they are discussing. The contrast in style paired with the academic setting, and the accusation that degrowth logic is not well-founded, creates an effect that proponents of degrowth are too emotional and not trustworthy.

Second, it is a common rhetorical strategy to label alternative ideas as idealistic and use "facing reality" to squash critiques of growth-centric capitalism and gloss over its social and environmental harms (Wilhite 2016, 78). In the corpus, many actors from various positions in the debate call their opponent's arguments (and by extension each other) "ideological", "dogmatic", "illogical". For example, van den Bergh (UoB 2017) makes a number of claims about his a-growth stance to suggest that degrowth is the opposite. He says: "And I think that's naive and I like to be convinced by evidence. Research [and] academic evidence, that really holds some truth." He claims that his a-growth proposal is "not a big utopian ideological idea". Moreover, he suggests that proponents of both degrowth and green growth are dogmatic when he says of a-growth.

"This is not dogmatic. It's nothing. It's neutral about growth. Being neutral about growth. It's difficult. It has to sink in. If you haven't heard of it before give it some time. Don't immediately say yes or no, give it some time" (UoB 2017).

These statements demonstrate how he appeals to the audience to be 'rational;' not 'emotional'. He implies that those who accept the degrowth argument are captured in its emotive and dogmatic argument rather than based on sound empirical research. Jacobs (PEC 2018b) makes a similar attempt to undermine the credibility of the degrowth argument and scholarship. He says several times to his argument for green growth as being set in "the actual" and "the real world". He attempts to undermine Kallis and the degrowth debate by saying "I don't think you conduct moral and political debate in a world of your own invention. I think you have to do it, we all have to do it, in the world we're living in now." Implying that degrowth reasoning is unfounded and ideational. Kallis responds defensively saying: "I'm not naïve, and I'm not living in a world of my own imagination. I understand how the world works" (PEC 2018b). Moreover, Jacobs claims that the degrowth strategy is not feasible because it asks for too radical a transforming of society and says that green growth, though only a partial solution is a better strategy:

> I do believe that doing how much of it is possible, is much better, is a proper strategy. And it's not as good as doing all of it or doing even more but it is a proper strategy. And it's not a proper strategy to say let's go for perfection in rhetoric in plain and then achieve less than the best we can do." (PEC 2018b)

Similarly, Pollin says that Victor, while raising important issues, does not provide an actionable solution to address the imminent issue of global heating. Pollin says "I think Peter is raising very good points. I don't think that he's giving us necessarily an answer to those points. I don't have the answer. I think I have a reasonable framework for dealing with climate stabilisation now" (The Real News 2016).

Pollin makes use of urgency to justify green growth as a necessary and appropriate response to climate change. Urgency thus becomes a technique to de-prioritise other issues on the degrowth agenda that are no less pressing (as also evidenced in section 5.2.2). Moreover, the observations above indicate how actors respond to degrowth's "techniques of futuring" — the narrative attempts to predict or imagine a viable alternative rather than limit discourse by what currently is or a critique of the present (Hajer and Versteeg 2018). Opponents of transition discourses attempt to undermine

the legitimacy of prophetic counter-hegemonic ideas(l)s for being utopian and unrealistic. Once again, the degrowth discourses become marginalised by actors regulated by a discourse that dictates the right way to conduct rational argumentation.

Third, Kallis on two occasions had to correct the assumption that all degrowthers have rejected economics because they "don't like economics, [they] don't like any of their policies" (van den Bergh, UoB 2017). In the texts, both van den Bergh and Jackson criticise degrowthers for wanting to do away with economic. Twice, van den Bergh says not to "throw the baby out with the bathwater". Similarly, Jackson says:

> To my knowledge, the majority vision within the degrowth community is that we have to throw economics away because it has corrupted our imaginary and bounded our thinking through institutionalised rationality. […] The main difference I have with, at least part of, the degrowth community is that while I want to throw away growth-based economics, I do not want to throw away economic thinking. (Post-Growth Conference 2018)

The idea that degrowthers reject all economic thinking dates to when "French degrowth thinkers can be interpreted as being anti-economics in the sense that economics is viewed as the 'dismal science' from which we need to escape" (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1744). This assumption is not entirely accurate. In these texts, the degrowth proponents and their allies are all familiar with or well trained in traditional and ecological economics, and none have advocated that economics should be discarded.

The actual or perceived rejection of economics by some degrowth proponents raises two challenges for the degrowth discourse. For one, capitalist and neoliberal economic discourses have become so hegemonic that they are perceived by many to be the only credible and legitimate way to do things (Buch-Hansen 2018). Not just in politics but in the field of economics and its teachings. Growth based economics have become analogous of the entire field of economics under the guise that *There Is No Alternative*. A view that is critical of growth is perceived to be unfounded in the economic field — *It is* (after all) *the economy, stupid.* Moreover, ecological economics is perhaps seen as an inferior economic field. Or, at least actors, defending growth can lead their audience to think anti-growth arguments are illegitimate.

The second issue arises from supporters of a post-growth future and currents within degrowth recognise the foundations in ecological economics and would still want to do away with all economic traditions. They demonstrate even more deviance and

dissent resultant from a lack of trust in the expert and academic epistemes. This echoes the concerns of degrowth critics who, sympathetic to its goals, argue that degrowthers ought to make feminist and decolonial processes more explicit (Dengler and Seebacher 2019; Rodríguez-Labajos et al. 2019).

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Thus far, this chapter has observed the academic-activist identity enacted by degrowth advocates. Mixing the discourse of both cultures gives actors a chance to be perceived as credible and trustworthy by a larger audience than if they only identified with one or the other culture. Moreover, it is in keeping with the role of the post-normal scientist to place as much value on advocacy as they do research. However, through the examination of collective identity processes, it is observable that mixing socially situated languages can also be precarious. Opponents and allies of degrowth question the appropriateness and credibility of the discourses (identities and frames) enacted degrowth advocates. In a feedback loop, degrowth advocates work to credentialise themselves even more to affirm the legitimacy of their economic argument that is denied fo them.

6.2   **Tightrope talk**

By virtue of being a social movement, post-normal and activist-led science (Demaria et al. 2013), intellectual advocates for the degrowth movement enact an identity of *both* activist *and* scholar. The preceding analysis demonstrates how movement intellects enact a both/and identity as they draw from two discourses. From one moment, actors engage in deviant language — contend with the hegemonic growth paradigm and reject 'positive', 'rational' and 'pragmatic' reasoning. In the next, they blend in as native speakers and conform to standard economic and scientific rhetoric to be accepted by mainstream economists and persuade their audiences. The activist/scholar binary is somewhat simplistic — it does not capture the plurality of roles the actors play outside of the texts. However, it does aid in the understanding of the paradoxes intellectual advocates of degrowth experience in their boundary work. In the discussion that follows, I will argue how the dual identity presents both opportunities and challenges for degrowthers as they take up "tightrope talk" (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2011).

In this section, I will illustrate how intellectual advocates are both challenged and creative in empowering new narratives. Their creativity can be easily missed. Tightrope talk is a useful concept to understand the challenges and opportunities degrowthers have when enacting both cultures at once.[35] McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2011) introduce the term tightrope talk to describe the challenges and possibilities that emerge when women were forced to translate their experiences (that are not reflected in the dominant) by using language in non-standard ways to empower narratives and counter–stories. When ill-fitting master frames and narratives are so predominant, and suitable counter-narratives are scarce, marginalised people struggled to articulate their experiences (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2011). They are forced to translate their experience in novel forms and use language in non-standard ways. The term tightrope talk relates to degrowth advocacy because movement intellects have access to draw from and toggle between *either* deviant *or* standard language. However, attempting to mix the two socially situated languages and identities (from an either/or binary to both/and hybrid) can be a clumsy endeavour that renders an actors argument (and by extension the movement they advocate for) as incoherent and incongruent.

To illustrate with a brief example: Anderson (PEC 2018a) encourages re-moralising the debate but all the same, making use of climate framing, and he did not centre his arguments around well-being, human values or ecocentric values. Topics such as morality and well being are perhaps viewed as too 'soft' for the context of 'hard' economic and scientific debate. It is challenging for actors to switch between pragmatic to moral arguments, regardless of where they stand in the debate. For example, at the same conference, Jacobs also attempts to acknowledge that moral arguments have a place but struggles to articulate himself:

> This takes me to my final point and it is a pragmatic political one but I don't want to kind of limit it in that sense, because I think it's our, for me it's our philosophical, uhh uhh it comes from the philosophical um claim on uhh on uhh on our morality. Which is, um, um yeah, belongs in this sphere (PEC 2018b).

It is illuminating that he struggles with linguistic incongruence although he too sees a place for a moral argument. The "sphere" of green political-economic debate enables

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[35] McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2011) examine how women negotiate the inadequate language and framings available to them when telling their stories about living well after rape and depression.

and constrains the social situated languages, identities and activities available to actors include moral arguments in their advocacy.

On first consideration of how the tightrope talk analogy applies to the intellectual advocacy observed in the corpus, I interpreted it to be a constraint on discourse. That two seemingly contradictory identities limited the creative opportunities for degrowth storytellers to enact a discourse that encompasses a radical critique and scholarly prognosis. But, on closer inspection, I became aware that I had missed the subtlety in the creativity and duality that some actors demonstrate. Then overshadowed by the power of dominant discourses, subtle shades of meaning can be missed if researchers are not attuned to listening carefully (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2011, 64).

6.2.1   Pessimism of the intellect and optimism of will

Tightrope talk also mirrors the very "contradictory tension" between actors and groups engaged in the movement that Kallis describes as a "creative aspect of the degrowth community" (Post-Growth Conference 2018). In addition to the fragmentation groups within degrowth have towards economics (to keep or throw it away) degrowthers enact another paradox that aptly illustrates tightrope talk — pessimism of the intellect and optimism of will.[36]

Politics of pessimism

In the corpus, actors disagree on the importance of historical precedence, as is common in the scientific work of economists (McCloskey 1983, 482). Jacobs says that history does not determine what the future will be like (PEC 2018b); Smith that things that have not happened before can happen (SUM 2019); and Folkerts-Landau that throughout history the predictions of the future have been wrong (ZEIT Wirtschaftforumn 2018). At UoB (2017), van den Bergh says: "I have to add that there's also in all my writings on this topic, I have to write, always a paragraph to say that I am optimistic about the economy in principle as tremendous flexibility to change. But we have to put pressure on it. It won't change by itself."

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[36] An aphorism often related to Antonio Gramsci which describes the dual tension between pessimism resultant from knowledge that must be balanced with optimisum that disaster can be avoided.

Opponents and even allies of degrowth (Folkerts-Landau, Jacobs and van den Bergh) dismiss degrowth for being doomist, not grounded in reality and "a very very long shot". "We are both arguing about a different world [but] his future is even more different than my future" (Jacobs, PEC 2018b). However, it can be counter-argued that green growth is no less 'utopic' or unrealistic as any other strategy to address climate and environmental crisis. Green growth's vision is a technological utopia of material abundance (de Geus 2002). However, this future has weak normative justifications (Sandberg, Klockars, and Wilén 2019); its visioning of the future is based on optimistic and yet to be proven predictions for technological solutions such as carbon capture and storage (Wilhite 2016); and it is modest in its view as it has not conceptualised the full scope of social and environmental issues at hand (Wilhite 2016).

Other transition scholars are not so optimistic about degrowth because it is simply *too* different. Trainer (2012) argues that for a post-growth future to be realised it must take a particular form which is fundamentally incompatible with a consumer-capitalist society. In other words, there cannot be a hybrid degrowth process negotiated through national or local political processes. As such, for some, democratic reform may be insufficient, and an alternative participatory democracy is suggested by some degrowthers (Eversberg and Schmelzer 2018). In the corpus, some proponents are not optimistic about their vision, and there is a disconnect between what they say ought to be and what they believe is possible. To illustrate, Kallis on septate occasions hedges his argument by being pessimistic, saying that a voluntary and prosperous degrowth transition is unlikely.

> You might argue that [degrowth] is politically impossible and I think you would be right. […] I am much less optimistic than Jeroen that this reasonable proposal which has been on the table for decades now can suddenly be political implemented, given the lack of political momentum right now behind this kind of proposal. (Kallis, UoB 2017)

Given the position of influence, movement intellects have it is not advantageous for the movement that one of its key intellectual figures is not convinced by his own argument. On first glance, when Kallis ends on a pessimistic note, it seems as though his advocacy tells a tragic story that is neither hopeful nor helpful for building the movement. However, there is shaded meaning which can too easily be missed.

Though Kallis admits that degrowth might be politically *im*possible, he also argues against green growth, saying it also is impossible. He says green growth mode of low-carbon and sustainable transition is "an illogical hypothesis […]. Of course, you might want to dig our head in the ground and say yes but for 50 years more it's possible. […] One generation has to be brave enough to address these questions of how the landing is going to take place" (PEC 2018b). He says "I wouldn't concede that we have to stop talking about it because then we make this pessimism a self-fulfilling prophecy" (PEC 2018b). Thus, he insists it is vital to "agree on the diagnosis" — that economic growth is not compatible with greening society — and adds "I don't think we should adjust the diagnosis to be politically possible".

Despite what he says about being "brave enough" this he still chooses to "close on a pessimistic note" (PEC 2018b). It is illuminating that Kallis succumbs to pessimism. More so, it is not uncommon. Despite advocating for sustaibale transitions, academics engaged in sustainable cities, discourses tend to produce a highly restrictive imaginary of future cities (Hajer and Versteeg 2018). I suggest that the term tightrope talk can partially explain Kallis's situational pessimism. The use of prophetic discourse and non-standard language in arenas of economic debate is neither received well nor articulated easily. When rebutted for being unrealistic and living in a world of their own imagination, it is unsurprising that Kallis would hedge his arguments. It is perhaps an attempt to affirm the identity of credible and trustworthy economists and scientists that other actors deny them (Melucci 1995, 48). In other texts, where the credibility of degrowth scholarship is not being questioned, he is also vocally enthusiastic about his involvement in the movement and says degrowth is inevitable (Kallis 2015, Post-Growth Conference 2018). In settings such as these actors have, a figurative safety net under their tightrope and perhaps more freedom to be both willfully optimistic and dubious. Another text in the corpus illustrates this clearly.

Utopian will power

At the SUM degrowth panel (2019), Sachs Olsen and Smith enact a prophetic discourse and make use of utopian imaginary. It is relevant to note that they did so in a 'safe' context with fellow degrowth activists on the panel. When asked by an audience member to provide "pragmatic attempts" rather than "utopian policy changes" Sachs Olsen and Smith reject the call for pragmatism. The former saying that utopia versus pragmatism is an unhelpful binary. The latter that in a democratic process

there will be a compromise between the two so it is neither necessary nor useful for them to start with the pragmatic option.

Sachs Olsen argues that utopianism something to positive that should be put to use. She says it way to critique what is wrong in society, discover things to avoid and steer towards more positive alternatives. Her call for utopia to be part of the politics of degrowth serves to imagine a possible future echo the degrowth literature. The degrowth movement adopts an aim to articulate *nowtopias*. "Nowtopians" are celebrated in the degrowth community for being an essential part of the politics of degrowth. Homegrown initiatives and trials of eco-conscious behaviours are seen as a crucial first step for societies embracing degrowth (Carlsson 2014). Moreover, the reference to nowtopias and utopian narratives demonstrate 'techniques of futuring' whereby actors can deploy narratives of what is not yet normalised degrowth behaviour but to imagine what could become policy or social practices (Hajer and Versteeg 2018).

De Geus (2002) also argues that "Utopia is worth considering as a mobilising narrative for sustainability" (Endreson 2014, 33). Ecological utopias intend not to be a fixed destination or blueprint for society. Instead, they challenge actors to reflect on and determine their position in relation to an ideal and then use utopia as a compass to guide decision making and adjust course. However, utopia is often not recognised in politics as it is seen to be incompatible with postmodernism and pragmatism, and has negative connotations for being potentially totalitarian (de Geus 2002).

Smith expresses "I actually think that we've had too many decades now talking about pragmatism, and I have no interest in talking about pragmatic solutions." She defends elements of the degrowth ideology saying it would not make sense to start by selling the pragmatic thing to the people, because "if we are talking about a democratic transition, then the middle way will anyway be a compromise". She indicates that in a democratic society, degrowth need not be the chosen path for everyone. Smiths point on democratic compromise demonstrates that the degrowth argument is not as fantastical and unrealistic as opponents make degrowth out to be. She acknowledges that degrowth processes would not entail a complete substitute overnight and that there are small incremental measures. Her reluctance reflects the problem with placing consensus-building demands on already marginalised groups. The insistence that

social movements advocate for not only their own groups interests but also serve every other interest set's them up to fail (Purcell 2009). Her view coincides with the claim that that degrowth aims to encompass a plurality of worldviews rather than be a totalising ideology (Deschner and Hurst 2018).

6.2.2   Creative struggles of narrating the future

At present, the degrowth discourse appears to destined to be marginalised because it seems incoherent, fragmented and unable to allure even the public or politics (Buch-Hansen 2018; Ferguson 2015). Degrowthers have insufficient linguistic resources (such as counter-frames and metaphors) to articulate their alternative vision. Similarly, transition discourses, in general, have not yet sufficiently crystallised within larger orders of discourse (for example, among green political economy discourses) (Audet 2016). As such, the degrowth movement is not well received by even its heterodox discourse coalitions. The inadequacy of existing metaphors, frames and stories to tell about a post-growth economy, post-fossil fuel society (or any type of eco-socially transformed society) is a significant challenge for degrowthers and the like (Hajer and Versteeg 2018). However, all is not lost. Collectively, actors draw from the discursive resources available to them and walk a tightrope between both cultures and struggle to create new, hybrid identities and counter-frames to support their aims and arguments.

Many social movement actors, oscillate between perspectives, dependent on the social context (Benford 1997). Some transition movements attempt to make use of *ecological utopias* or *utopias of sufficiency* (in contrast to the ecomodernist technologically advanced and materially abundant utopias). Prophetic discourse and utopian narratives are useful for transition discourses (de Geus 2002; Kamminga 2008). However, opponents and allies of degrowth alike may not immediately recognise a prophetic discourse, futuring narratives and emerging counter-frames. "New concepts do not come to us ready-made; their novelty defies our existing language and conceptual schema" (Klamer and Leonard 1994, 31).

Moreover, intellectual pessimism is unsurprising as PNS scholars (such as ecological economist and degrowthers) might not aim to be 'right' (for example in diagnosing the unsustainability of infinite growth) but rather intend to be useful (by prognosing transition strategies) (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994). Tightrope talk across multiple

socially situated identities and activities can lead to linguistic incongruence as speakers clumsily and creatively draw from the discourses available to them to express novel ideas. So, when taken to be whole people movement intellects are not either pessimistic or willful optimists. They can, in a cognitive struggle, be both.

This is creative but clumsy work (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2011). For example, if life satisfaction and sufficiency pursued by the movement, then it is conflicting to use negative frames such as austerity and sacrifice to argue for degrowth. To chart the unknown, sciences and social agents need metaphors, among other counter-frames and discursive resources (Klamer and Leonard 1994, 31). Thus, the hegemonic frames of climate emergency, the economy and overconsumption can be unproductive as illustrated in Section 5.2.

The use of counter-stories can serve the function of "narrative repair" to reorient dominant ways of thinking and speaking (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2011, 66). For example, about the economy which has become associated with infinite growth through sicky political rhetoric that insists "the economy, stupid" and "there is no alternative". Utopia, more so than a heuristic of fear, is a useful narrative to attend to and thicken. Not because actors aim to be right and live in an idealistic world, but because transition narratives and alternatives to growth are scarce. Through democratic processes and a coalition of support, the degrowth movement may influence politics and pull society towards the post-growth future (Bollier and Conaty 2014; Buch-Hansen 2018).

Change agents need not be deterred by slights made against utopia. The term tightrope talk illuminates not only how marginalised actors attempt to empower novel ways of speaking but also how these attempts are not recognised *because* they are novel. Deviance in the form of divergent meanings and unconventional language and practices is the norm for sciences and institutions in the Anthropocene (Hoffman and Jennings 2015). Moreover, modern environmentalism can benefit from embracing hybrid, pluralistic identities (Anderson 2010). However, intellectual advocates of degrowth must traverse using both internal and public arenas; they should be aware of how audiences receive their tightrope talk. For example, among those that are not yet convinced of the credibility or trustworthiness of an actor (and the movement they

support), tightrope talk will inevitably be met with criticism. Even with supportive allies, there is be a struggle to reach consensus and create shared meanings.

6.3　Collective identity as a double-edged sword

Actors in the corpus and degrowth literature acknowledge that degrowth thinking has had a limited impact on policy, politics, economic fields and social practices. Over several texts, Kallis describes the degrowth community as unique and creative when he acknowledges disagreements, tensions and conflict as strengths and not weaknesses. However, if we are to take degrowth as a PNS — then the actor's perspective on knowledge production and pluralism are not unique, but rather the goal of good transdisciplinary practice. At the Post-Growth Conference (2018) Kallis reflects on how the degrowth is still a small and niche community of thought and practice. "Whenever I step out of the Twitter echo chamber and my academic circles, I am reminded that we still have a long way to go and have only just begun to open some space for conversations about growth and degrowth."

> Our conferences are now much bigger and more diverse. […] Of course, not everyone agrees with one another — some might think that economic models are reproducing the dominant way of thinking, others that they are useful for thinking practically about how to manage without growth. The important thing is that the degrowth community is not closing itself up or keeping economics, or any other discipline for that matter, out. (Post-Growth Conference 2018)

Degrowth has minimally begun to create space for environmental justice groups in the South, non-expert or policy actors to enter the arena of discussion. It is limiting for the shared aims of transition that the movement has not yet leveraged its extended peer communities and ally groups. As long as they do so degrowth continues to exists within the margins of political economy discourse — a niche within niches pursuing an ambitious, broad and complex vision.

It is useful to return to social movement theorising to understand collective identity as a double-edged sword. 'We' is a double-edged sword as it has two conflicting effects — a strong collective identity can be both beneficial and harmful to movements and the groups within them (Jasper and McGarry 2015; Saunders 2008). Actors must continuously negotiate between appealing new audiences and speaking in solidarity

with their peers from a group within the movement. Between their discourse coalitions, they have an affinity and shared concern and maintain a strong sense of who we are and what we stand for.

Saunders (2008) argues that 'we' can be a dangerous pronoun than can divide rather than unite their movement. it can constrain individuals within a group, and it can lead to stereotyping by those outside of the group. Furthermore, the distinction between 'we' and 'them' entails both inclusion and exclusion. Defining and defending a 'we' can result in hostile relationships with other groups outside and even within a movement. I argue that this is true for degrowth and its heterodox discourse coalitions. Relational dynamics such as these have been observed in the corpus and described in Section 6.1. Actors can, in their preservation of a strong degrowth identity exclude those who are vital to the success of the degrowth movement's ability to find "a comprehensive coalition of social forces" — other heterodox groups, political actors, public supporters and so on (Buch-Hansen 2018, 159).

In their discourse, degrowth actors defined an 'us' and a 'them'. 'Us' included academics, activists, degrowthers, ecological economists, those in the Global North, southerners at heart, global citizens. And 'they' were classical economists, rich people, win-win love triangles. Sometimes 'they' were not just growth enthusiasts but also the public, consumers, politicians, other socialists, the greens. In other words, degrowth actors sometimes excluded othered heterodox groups and actors. Particularly the naysaying oppositional and friendly critics who warn that degrowth is not an appealing word, is divisive and all too radical a concept. If potential recruits to the movement find elements of the degrowth identity off-putting or inconsistent with their own identity risk marginalising the movement further.

Despite their marginality, and need for alliances, the aim of expanding the movement's ideas was at times deprioritised in favour of 'us' and the maintenance of ideological and discourse purity that cannot be co-opted. I will reiterate with a few examples from the previous sections. Some actors in the corpus adopted fighting speak and battled even against their sympathetic critics. Kallis (2015) also talks about having the "Right conversations with the right people" and expresses his sense of allegiance to the movement over potential alliances. Actors deliberately chose to frame the degrowth argument in negative terms and justify some of this choice by claiming that their ideas

and discourse cannot be co-opted in the way that Ubuntu and Buen Vivir have been co-opted by marketing and development agendas. Or in the same way that the 'green' and 'sustainability' signifiers have been co-opted in environmental modernity discourse to promote continued economic growth (Gallon 2015).

The strength of weak ties.

The movement advocates should be cautious that their desires to maintain ideological and discourse purity (in defence of co-opting forces) do not lead the movement to become closed off or fetishised (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1745). This cautionary suggestion is not unique to degrowth and echoes. Eckersley (1992, 70) argues that an ecocenteric emancipatory framework would entail a strong ecofeminist input and should not privilege one group over another in its policy or name. Anderson (2010) also argues that environmentalism should be less doctrinaire. Instead, degrowth, like environmentalism, may benefit from being malleable and pluralistic — even if then perceived as contradictory and inconsistent. There is strength in weak ties (Granovetter 1973). Weaker (non-comprehensive collective identities) may allow for bridges to be built across movements and with other organisations because they are less we-them

This is a particularly paradoxical point to make. To be clear, for the degrowth movement to make fruitful ties with other heterodox discourse coalitions and transition movements they should embrace an amount of flexibility to their identity; even though actors from those coalitions criticise degrowth for needing to be more clear and concise.

To summarise, There is a great deal of overlap between degrowth and other social movements interested in commoning, environmental and social justice and societal transformation. This is promising for the basis of broad coalitions (Bollier and Conaty 2014). In their public-facing boundary work, they wield a double-edged sword. Proponents of the movement, have the opportunity to leverage alliance relationships to compliment the degrowth proposal or argue against and disconnect them from their goals in favour of defending the unique positioning of degrowth. The double edge of an activist/academic identity presents yet another dilemma for degrowth actors to consider in their efforts to make the movement less marginal.

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The analysis suggests that there are duel effects of degrowths identity and internal rhetoric which presents a dilemma for degrowth proponents to consider. On the one hand, the use of negative framing and deviant language unites the currents of the degrowth spectrum. Simultaneously, standard economic speak can be suitable in the context of academic discussion and debate where most texts are situated and aid degrowthers to defend the legitimacy of their argument. On the other hand, the rhetoric of resistance and non-conformity degrowth risks creating polarisation within between perspectives within its movement (Eversberg and Schmelzer 2018). Movement advocates experience an observable conflict — degrowthers need to establish their credibility and legitimacy in the economic and academic genera of discourse and may do so at the expense of promoting a clear and well-articulated vision rooted in social and ecological values and embracing of pluralistic principles. Thus, some actors risk marginalising the movement further from mainstream and other green political economy discourse (Ferguson 2015). Indeed, the texts chosen are not exemplary of all contexts or audiences degrowthers have. By extending the analysis further, I illustrate how the negative and prophetic elements of the degrowth discourse are reproduced in artwork, grassroots actors, and public discourse.

6.4   **Recapitulation**

If it has not been clear, the preceding chapter does not exist to deconstruct the degrowth identity with the intention of essentialising or belittling it. Collective identity analysis has been critiqued for doing so (Jasper and McGarry 2015). Moreover, I would not suggest dismantling the degrowth discourse or write off anti-growth movements as fundamentally flawed as some critics have (Ferguson 2015; Glasson 2015). Instead, I wish to illustrate that new social movements, particularly those with emancipatory goals, do not easily fit into existing frameworks of politics (Giddens 1991, 228) — as is the case of degrowth (Buch-Hansen 2018).

Bach-Hansen (2018) scores degrowth against four prerequisites for a paradigm change and finds degrowth lacks two — support from a comprehensive coalition of social forces and consent from the majority of people (or name recognition for that matter as few people have heard of degrowth). In my analysis, I have been able to explore how the degrowth discourse contributes to the movement being unable to meet these prerequisites. From their marginal position, it is evident that the degrowth movement

is attempting to decouple growth think and re-moralise social-life with other imaginative and creative ideas. However, the analysis also illustrates what might be counterproductive or contradictory about the prophetic and negatively perceived degrowth discourse and the debate it provokes. The incongruent counter-framing and degrowth identity may not be appealing to garner the necessary support from the general population and coalition groups. Moreover, the advocacy of movement intellects is regulated by the standard academic, economic and pragmatic speak they are familiar with performing (or pressured to enact by other actors in those arenas).

The degrowth is a project still under development. Likewise, the social construction of transition is clearly not yet completely crystallised (Audet 2016). Thus there is room for actors to redefine identities, and frames with a broad coalition of heterogeneous allies. The novel and incongruent narratives that actors produce are the results of their creative struggle to affirm the legitimacy of their scientific work under the constraints of the dominant frames they reproduce while also attempting to tell new stories that "re-moralise social life with widespread consensus" (231). So with the realisation that not all of their vocabulary is appealing, degrowth advocates can if willing, change their (dis)course (Sandberg, Klockars, and Wilén 2019).

Finally, I wish to clarify that collective identity can be used strategically by social movements (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 292). For example, by distinguishing 'us' from 'them' degrowthers not only depict themselves contenders but also to reveal that growth is propped up by actors and decision-makers, not to be mistaken as an innocuous, inevitable or impersonal force in economics and development. Moreover, it is necessary that scholars who are proponents a post-growth transition succumb to some amount of 'epistemological excess' of other economists and scientists in order to be perceived as legitimate in the arenas they share (McCloskey 1998).

Intellectual advocates of the degrowth movement enact a novel and deviant identity which can act as a double-edged sword. Their internal rhetoric can galvanise the sub-strands of the movement, or when applied externally, trade-off potential allies from groups that have some affinity with. The sword, then, must be wielded with care and creativity as it is walked across a tightrope, and the performance tailored for one's various aims and audiences.

7 Advancing the movement and its discourse

A great message doesn't say what's already popular; a great message makes popular what needs to be said.

—Anat Shenker-Osorio, Messaging This Moment (2017)

Transition discourse actors have a role to play in empowering new narratives and popularise heterodox transition pathways and visions (Audet 2016). Degrowthers have quite literally tasked themselves with developing *A vocabulary for a new era* (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2014). Of course, the responsibility is shared by agents from all sources and strands of degrowth — the intellectual paradigm, political project and grassroots movement. As such, it becomes necessary that the movement "[direct] attention toward the development of a terminology for the differing roles that field members play within social movement politics" (Hoffman and Jennings 2015). The actors in the corpus I have analysed practice advocacy in a variety of influential arenas and are "signalling agents" to other scholars and movement actors (Demaria et al. 2013, 193). Within the institutional settings degrowth proponents are intellectual advocates of the degrowth idea; outside of them they are agents of change for the movement. Whether they recognise it or not; are effective at it or not.

In this final chapter of analysis and discussion, I will postulate whether the actors in the corpus recognise the importance of language in their boundary work and what to do with it. Additionally, I consider what actors can do with more time to support their vision for a degrowth paradigm shift and proposal to realise it. I will make three suggestions in response to the framing and collective identity dilemmas degrowth advocates face. Movement intellects should complement their scientific work with literary thinking; acknowledge their role in constructing discourse that can facilitate movement building; and from their position on the tightrope struggle to empower new narratives.

7.1   Degrowth, on the defence

Raworth's suggests to degrowthers that they need to find a new frame and a new word because it is a clear indicator that something is not working "when you find yourself

continually having to explain the basics and clear up repeated misunderstandings" (2015). In response, Kallis (2015) says that degrowth (the missile word) has not yet landed and that it is too soon to abandon it. He says "We have to defend and develop the content." Similarly, Sandberg, Klockars, and Wilén (2019) acknowledge that because degrowth is still under development and has several uncertainties around it. So they suggest that as degrowth evolves its normative ideals ought to be "continually evaluated, and degrowth proponents must be willing to change course if their proposed solutions seem to be insufficient to reach their goals" (140). It is unclear if the authors consider language or identity to be one of these solutions. However, discursive resources can in fact be used strategically by movements towards the achievement of their goals. The deployment of alternative vocabularies, counter-frames, counter-stories is a necessary aspect of counter-hegemonic discursive struggles (Benford and Snow 2000; McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2011; Purcell 2009).

I raise the above point to illuminate two further observations from my analysis. First, I examine whether the actors recognise that the success of social movements is contingent, in part, on their discourse. Secondly, to observe what degrowth actors make of time to defend their discourse.

7.1.1 Are intellectual advocates rhetorically aware

The corpus includes discussion on the role of discourse in politics and a degree of self-reflection on how actors, themselves and others, speak. For example, Jacobs reflects on the struggle green growth actors have had creating a publically and politically salient message that goes far enough towards genuine climate stabilisation:

> Because they [politicians] found a discourse which is sufficiently comfortable for them and which has sufficient political support to enable them to go down that path… And I think that is what green growth has done. It has enabled those first moves in that direction to occur. So within the discourse [of green growth] there are all kinds of positions I think we don't really want, to be honest. But I think the discourse has helped move the politics, and there for the policy, and there for actually what's happened quite a lot. But within the discourse you then have to fight for the priority of climate over growth, per se. And the fight is not won. Nobody on the green growth side suggesting, 'ah we've got it now, emissions and decoupling, so it's all fine'. The fight is now massive. (PEC 2018b)

Jacobs not only reflects on the importance of discourse in politics but refers to a concern degrowthers have that it is impossible to balance the priorities of growth and climate (Alaimo 2012; Kirby and O'Mahony 2018). Growth based capitalism, they fear, will always co-opt the agenda. As such, I have already demonstrated how degrowthers purposefully choose an *un*co-optable vocabulary and defend their use of negative framing to encourage conflict with the hegemonic growth paradigm. There are occasions when degrowth actors can recognise some of the ways in which the degrowth movement and its proposal is misunderstood.

Referring back to Kallis's call to defend and develop *the content and proposed solutions* of degrowth — I suggest this is not the same as the defence of the word or their rhetoric. Raworth does not contest what degrowth is about but rather "the way the ideas are being presented". However, the preceding sections illustrated how degrowth actors counter-argue every suggestion for alternative framing. Should actors then not welcome the reflections and critiques raised by myself in this thesis, the texts and the literature, in order to help them steer their course? Perhaps being inflammatory is part of the embodied performance of the discourse, it helps actors enact a deviant discourse that is steeped in the anti-capitalist margins of the mainstream. If all you have is a hammer — even well-intended advice to advance the goals of the movement looks like a nail.

There has not been a total lack of consideration given to discourse on behalf of degrowthers in these texts. We can assume that effective communication is something the movement is mindful of when looking at the program for the most recent degrowth conference.[37] Communication workshops and sessions relevant to the production of the degrowth discourse were present and included: Communicating degrowth, unleashing fantasy, knowledge production for degrowth, degrowth digital presence moving forward. Moreover, these spaces are safe havens to practice tightrope talk internally before translating it to external rhetoric.

However, there is a point of difference between, on the one hand, being aware of the importance of rhetoric or able to justify one's choice of framing; on the other, being aware of the effect a discourse has on an actor's argument and on their audience(s).

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[37] See full Vienna 2020 program www.degrowthvienna2020.org/en/program/

Moreover, awareness does not equate an ability to *change*. To illustrate, Kallis says "I understand, to a certain extent, the tactical approach of not using the term degrowth but the numbers don't square" (Post-Growth Conferencce 2018). On another occasion (UoB 2017), he acknowledges that he has work to do in better explaining the proposal as he can see from his debate and discussion partners it is not coming across. When Kallis attempts to explain himself, he does so not through illustrations, anecdotes, or stories but by putting forward more studies, modelling and evidence. As if "numbers" would make the message "square" and persuade his intellectual opponents, allies or the general public among whom the degrowth idea has not yet landed (UoB 2017). Though he acknowledges messaging matters, he neglects (in the texts sampled) to *do* much about it.

Luks (1998) made a call to ecological economists and Bruner and Oelschlaenger (1994) to ecophilosophy community (environmentalists and ethics), to be more rhetorically self-aware. In short, to be cognisant that all their advocacy and rational argumentation is rhetoric and that they must adapt their discourse to internal and external audiences. Have movement intellects engaged in sustainable transformation and green economy discourses heard this call self-awareness? To some extent, yes. There is an awareness that discourse is a contributing factor to the success or failure of political ideas.

However, as evidenced in the preceding two chapters, it is not an easy feat to mobilise a new imaginary or activate alternative frames when dominant narratives are so pervasive. More so, when placed in the discursive genera of debate, there is little motivation for actors to reach consensus with their opponent. Opponents and even allies can deliberately misunderstand or undermine those who challenge them (Benford and Snow 2000). The degrowth argument for a radical sustainable transition is still politically unpalatable, socially unfamiliar and economically niche (Buch-Hansen 2018). In general, transition discourses have not yet crystalised. To realise heterogeneous transition pathways and destinations, proponents of transition (including degrowth advocates) must work to popularise new narratives and frames (Audet 2016, 14).

7.1.2 Time for the "missile to land"

Might degrowth just need more time? Yes, most certainly degrowth needs more time to construct their discourse (arguments, frames, narratives, vision) for it to become culturally resonate. Moreover, given the complexity and scope of degrowths goals, actors also need time to discuss the issues at hand. However, what is essential is what proponents *do* with the time. At the SUM panel discussion, Sachs Olsen says "we should actually insist on having that time to really dig into these issues." She means 'we' degrowthers should not be asked to summarise what degrowth is about in a few sentences or allow their proposal to be reduced to dualisms of have or have not, build or not. Indeed, this was precisely the purpose of this thesis, as the sources I have chosen offer actors an opportunity (time!) to do precisely that. The (oral) texts range between 30 minutes and two hours. Actors are able to discuss the intricacies of the debate about degrowth under broad themes and questions posed by the moderators.

The texts I have sampled have audiences of supportive or critical students, policymakers, activists for example. We can presume many of whom have not yet been won over by the degrowth argument or are fluent speakers of their discourse. Degrowth proponents should not presume their paradigmatic argumentation to be sufficiently motivating to these audiences. The Oxfam (Kallis 2018) blog hosted a vote for readers to choose between the arguments made. Of 450 voters were asked what they thought about degrowth the results were: Siding with Kallis "a good idea and a good word 42%; with Raworth "a good idea, but a bad word" 38% or a third option "not a good idea so the word is immaterial" 21%. The readers poll is hardly evidence enough to motivate degrowths actors to change their framing. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that even in what was likely to be an audience enthusiastic about the post-growth agenda, degrowth does not have a landslide of support.

I have already suggested that in over 40 years, the limits to growth argument has not led to a degrowth paradigm shift but rather a green growth and sustainable development agenda. Jacobs (PEC 2018b) reflects on the green growth discourse has over the same time period *changed* to become comfortable enough for politics to adopt and "sell to their populace, to their populations, to their business communities." Hegemonic growth discourses have been able to adapt to the changing priorities to include a green and socially responsible agenda; however 'genuine' this may be

(Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994, 199). Sustainable development and green growth have become institutionalised through international organisations such as the OECD and UN (OECD 2019; United Nations n.d.).

Degrowthers have significant reason to defend their negative framing. They are not wrong to be sceptical of co-optation as hegemonic discourses encroach on green signifiers (Glasson 2015). All the same hegemonic growth discourses pervade and transition discourses remain marginal. But what has degrowth achieved with 40 years?

Weiss and Cattaneo (2017) find that interest in degrowth is growing. As of May 2016, Google returned 253,000 web pages in response to the search term *degrowth* with a steady increase between 2006 and 2016. A small result compared to the twice as large return of the search for *post-growth*. And a fraction of the result compared to searches on *climate change*, *sustainability* and *economic growth* which return results in the tens of millions. During the same time period, peer review articles show a similarly small but growing number of publications on degrowth. Google searches for 'degrowth' fluctuated at around 27±12 per month over those ten years (Weiss and Cattaneo 2017). In terms of discourse, peer-reviewed literature does not yet address how the discourse has been taken up.[38] Longitudinal studies would be necessary, for example to observe how, in the case of degrowth, social movement frames change (Benford 1997). Ecological economics have become more similar to environmental economics (Plumecocq 2014). "An honest recognition of conflicting interests and of power relationships will protect such negotiations from becoming a covert co-optation by one side" (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994, 204).

It is a falsity to assume that time alone would be sufficient for degrowth to become more salient. More time is an insufficient argument unless it includes a emphasis spending that time to meet the criteria necessary to achieve a degrowth paradigm shift (Buch-Hansen 2018). Although the presence of crises is one precursor for a paradigm shift, amounting more economical and environmental crisises over time will not necessarily make degrowth seem more appealing or inevitable. Actors must find ways to improve their discourse by working in solidarity (though not necessarily agreement)

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[38] The reproduction of degrowth's discourse is addressed in two separate thesis dissertations. One addressing the uptake of degrowth storylines in public discourse (Bähr 2016), the other considers the intersection of the degrowth and transition town discourses (Merker 2019).

with other heterodox discourses and extended peer communities to influence other conversations and sectors of society.

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In sum, it should not be assumed that time alone will be sufficient to build up a case of crisis and events that make degrowth seem like the desirable option. Nor is it sufficient to spend that time challenging green growth logic. As evidenced actors can spend the time counter-framing to steer the conversation beyond the hegemonic framing of issues to more futile territory (by avoiding overconsumption framing) and use utopia as a narrative to support transition proposals. It is also evident that degrowthers are not entirely unaware of the importance of discourse. There is some degree of reflection by actors in the corpus. Moreover, at conferences, workshops are held to refine their communication. These are ideal forums to practice tightrope talk.

However, given the limited scholarship and public discussion conceding to the shortfalls of the degrowth discourse, it is justifiable that the possible adverse effects of the discourse be investigated. Finally, I acknowledge that there is an advantage to keeping the rhetorical playing cards close to their chests — to prevent co-option of their communication strategy. Thus, there is reason to be selective about what is disclosed publically.

7.2   The role of intellectual advocates

Degrowth advocates have tasked themselves with overcoming and decentring growth-imagery and building "a new imaginary with fresh images concepts and narratives" (Demmer and Hummel 2017, 614). They are not alone in this challenge. Bruner and Oelschlaeger (1994) ask the same of environmentalists and ecophilosophers to find credible images and spokespeople to use the appropriate means of persuasion sensitive to each audience and situation (394). PNS scholars to engage in boundary work between science and policy and thus cross-fertilize ways of thinking and speaking about complex problems (Wesselink and Hoppe 2011). Academics, advocates, ordinary people, you and I, need new vocabularies that can support our relationship to the environment (Bjørkdahl 2012, 35). Empowering new vocabularies is a clumsy process, met with criticism and easier to do in some contexts than others. Nonetheless,

with time they would support emerging thoughts, practices and institutions (or in the lack of formal organisations, collective identities).

In this section, I defend my argument that the actors analysed in this thesis have a role to play in the success or marginalisation of the degrowth movement's discourse. Then I suggest that actors are also coalition builders tasked with empowering their extended peer communities and creating ties with other heterodox discourses to strengthen heterogeneous pathways of transition. Among whom they can (somewhat safely) practice tightrope talk and thicken transition narratives. Finally, I make suggestions for how actors can subvert and repair dominant understandings about growth and the environment. In their place, develop more flexible appealing discursive pathways toward a post-growth.

7.2.1 Literary thinkers and communicators

McCloskey (1998) argued that economics is not be weakened by acknowledging it has a literary side. "An economist is not weakened by getting out of the sandbox he has played in since the 1940's" (xiii). She makes a feminist point to say that a human who embraces their whole self, soft and hard, feminine and masculine, literary and scientific is not weak nor stupid. They become no less committed to their cause and no less credible among other academics or activists by doing so. And so it is with degrowth movement intellectuals — all sciences, "even the other mathematical sciences, even the Queen herself, are rhetorical" (McCloskey 1998, 491). Actors are not always aware of it, but all texts, written or oral, use rhetoric. For intellectual activists to acknowledge that their work is rhetorical is an essential step in having actors tailor good and compelling messages for the audiences. Their advocacy is important for signalling to others what the movement believes and aspires to achieve.

Each speaker has three audiences to be mindful of when interpreting who it is they are attempting to persuade — their discussion partner (or debate opponent), the audience present and the audience listening, reading or watching online (removed from the original context). Rhetorical awareness, internally, can contribute to the improvement on the pluralistic emphasis of PNS and teaching ecological economics and by extension degrowth. Moreover, external awareness can promote the field, aid in attracting funding for projects and improve its political impact (Luks 1998).

An awareness of the social languages and socially situated identities which regulate the degrowth discourse can aid actors to exercise agency in transforming their discourse. Moreover, degrowth advocates can use rhetorical awareness to help others detangle and unlearn growth as an inevitable and incontestable paradigm. Change agents should appreciate how difficult it is to abandon a widely held belief and shift to a new paradigm, (not least because most likely experience it themselves) it is inherently emotive work that entails identity change (McCalman and Connelly 2019).

How people every day respond to degrowth framing is of utmost importance. Raworth and Scott-Cato, for example, connected conversations of this sort while the others used elite groups or their own intellectual peer community to validate their arguments. In an elevator pitch to actors aligned to activism and social movement recruitment, specifically, they continue to test ways to reframe the debate. Ample resources for framing climate change, environment, social issues and the economy are available to aid this work. I lapped these up when I was a community organiser and campaigner looking for better messaging, effective framing and winning arguments. For example, Lakoff's (2004) messaging advice in *Don't Think of an Elephant* (as mentioned by Raworth) and Shenker-Osorio (2012) book *Don't Buy It: The Trouble with Talking Nonsense About the Economy* or more practical handbook *Messaging This Moment: A Handbook for Progressive Communicators* (Shenker-Osorio 2017). Though not specific to a post-growth or even eco-centric vision such resources are developed by linguists to translated research into consultancy and manuals for progressive movements and policy-makers. They help to find the words that cut through the 'nonsense' that degrowth proponents claim to resist but are often regulated by.

7.2.2   Builders of coalitions and extended peer communities

Like ecological economics, degrowth scholarship is a Post-Normal Science and transdisciplinary. Its scholars must thus converse between disciplinary cultures and negotiate methodological pluralisms (Luks 1998). Moreover, in response to complex social and environmental systems, PNS sees researchers as agents that, through research and advocacy modes of argument, must negotiate and mediate policy issues with their extended peer-communities (Wesselink and Hoppe 2011). As movement

advocates, degrowth actors have several roles as activist-academics and need to be aware of such as the move between various arenas.

Wesselink and Hoppe (2011) argue that PNS has not been successful in bringing about policy changes to address complex and uncertain environmental problems. They suggest that this is because PNS although steeped in political discourse is framed as a science, not as an additive approach to deliberative democracy or governance. Although PNS has an explicitly political agenda, their work is framed in science which contradicts policy framings. I suggest the same might apply to ecological economics and degrowth.

Degrowth scholars from schools of political ecology and green political economy discuss policy and democracy in their scholarship and advocacy — they have explicitly political goals in their theorising and activism. However, Kallis admits the practical limitations of using degrowth in Barcelona's local policy and political settings (Post-Growth Conference 2018). He also recognises that the movement should not close itself off to economics or any other field. It is evident that degrowth proponents often reproduce hegemonic scientific and economic frames in their arguments and as they defend their scientific credibility. When discussed, it was clear that there is no answer on the horizon for how to make degrowth politically salient. Practical policy ideas and nowtopian projects in the name of degrowth were scarce. More so, despite the diversity of strands within the degrowth movement actors seldom referred to their extended peer communities or non-elite perspectives.

Wesselink and Hoppe (2011) suggest that outside of their scientific work, PNS scholars might benefit from reframing their advocacy in policy terms to suit their boundary work better rather than conforming to standard for scientific debate discourse (Wesselink and Hoppe 2011). With the responsibility of advocacy, researchers must take an honest look at their conflicting interests and relationship with power to protect their thinking and practice from becoming co-opted (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994, 204). For example, by the need to defend their legitimacy and conform to standard economic discourse. The risk of this is evidenced by ecological economics which becomes more similar to environmental economics over time (Plumecocq 2014).

This is not to say that democratic deliberation and policy agenda-setting should become the more explicit focus of the degrowth (or PNS) discourse. At least not on their own. In their advocacy and scholarship, they have a role to play in building extended peer communities and coalitions with other heterodox discourses and movements.

Coalition Alignment

A report on strategies for aligning commons movements found that movement actors have an immensely challenging task perusing both an agenda of "practical and pragmatic politics" and "transform political discourse" (Bollier and Conaty 2014). The authors posit (and I would agree) that degrowth's main contribution to sustainable transformation leans towards the latter — shifting discourses and paradigms. An already mammoth task that intersects environmentalism, economics, politics and society not just in Europe or in local settings but by extension internationally too. The degrowth movement, or at least local iterations of it and strands within it, might consider standing down from the agenda of practical and pragmatic politics while aligning with other movements and groups capable of perusing practical goals. To pursue both goals at once may result in failure or lead to further marginalisation of a movement. Thus a coalition of groups that focus on one while supporting others to peruse the other is necessary (Bollier and Conaty 2014; Buch-Hansen 2018).

However, a natural alliance between environmental justice groups in the global south should not be assumed. Though degrowth actors might feel an affinity with movements such as Ubuntu or Buen Vivir and share ideas for re-commoning and de-alienating their degrowth message is not globally appealing (Brownhill, Turner, and Kaara 2012; Rodríguez-Labajos et al. 2019). Though I have not explicitly applied a decolonial or feminist theory, my analysis echoes these critiques and observations of the degrowth discourse. Following their critique that degrowth is "an unfortunate term" Rodriguez-Labajos et al. (2019) suggest ways to strengthen alliances between degrowth in the North and environmental justice in the South (182). Among their arguments, they find that "the language with which degrowth ideas are articulated and communicated is critical" especially if they are to indeed have the global reach and salience many degrowth's claim (178). However, Escobar (2015, 452) notes that the "those engaged in transition activism and theorising in the North rarely delve into those from the South; conversely, those in the South tend to dismiss too easily northern proposals or

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to consider them inapplicable to their contexts. There has been little concerted effort at bringing these two sets of discourses and strategies into a dialogue that would be mutually enriching." Escobar (2015) also places responsibility on environmental justice in the South and degrowth in the north (along with other post-development and transition discourses) "to build explicit bridges between transitions narratives in the North and in the South, while respecting their historical, geopolitical, and epistemic specificities" (456).

From a feminist decolonial approach, Dengler and Seebacher (2019) argue that building these bridges would require self-reflection by degrowth activism and scholarship. Self-awareness and self-reflection have been reoccurring themes in this thesis. Degrowth actors, they argue, ought to frame feminism, decoloniality and anti-capitalism more explicitly as the guiding principles of the movement. Doing so would be in keeping with PNS principles and an ecocentric emancipatory framework (Eckersley 1992; Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994). Specifically, this would require degrowth scholars, constrained by the colonial discourses of Western research to adopt decolonial methodologies, unlearn the predominant epistemologies and de-ontologise the dichotomies such as male/female, nature/culture, north/south and science/activism. "[T]hough we must acknowledge the permanent and insurmountable contradictions of representation, degrowth activism and scholarship must not concede defeat but needs to — in a very self-reflexive mode that does not curtail our agency against systemic injustices — take up the challenge of building these bridges" (Dengler and Seebacher 2019, 251). Degrowth actors must make this effort to avoid repeating developing a colonial and gendered paradigm (again). However, in contrast to Dengler and Seebacher I would not fully agree "that instead of focusing on the specific wording, shared values and deontological foundations can act as important building stone of common action…" (251). From a discourse theoretical perspective, rhetoric does, in fact, also matter and can be used to understand some of the norms and assumptions regarding the values and figured world of actors in the movement.

It is not, as Demmer and Hummel (2017, 617) suggest, simply that the deconstruction of the modern imaginary and the dualisms it entails "would open the way to learn to see the world as a pluriverse full of different discourses of transition and discourses all related to modernity, development and capitalism." It is *also* that agents of change would need to become attuned to seeing and hearing transition discourses as they are

spoken; in solidarity and struggle with one another the paradigm of modernity can be dismantled and new narratives thickened.

7.2.3　Creating and repairing counter-narratives

New social movements, particularly those with emancipatory goals, do not easily fit into existing frameworks of politics (Giddens 1991, 228) — as is the case of degrowth (Buch-Hansen 2018). As such, part of the movement's goal must be to "re-moralise social life with widespread consensus" (231). Degrowthers find themselves partway towards finding alternative (recycled or new) vocabularies — they have found the rhetoric of dissent and resistance to challenge the growth paradigm. Thought the activist-academic tightrope actors traverse is precarious, some movement intellects demonstrated creativity and bravery by rejecting standard language or using it in novel ways. My analysis illustrates that it is possible to repair the current framing of the debate about economic growth and the environment. Actors need be bold enough to inject counter-frames (through the means of new narratives, metaphors and hybrid identities) about utopia, morality, well-being into settings where doing so is uncommon.

Glasson (2015) suggests a "subversive rearticulation" of the ecological modernisation discourse that is bound by hegemonic pro-growth, industrialism, consumerism and the nation-state ideology. Rather than combat these ideologies head on as anti-growth discourse do, he argues for the use of "pivot" terms that are neutral or agnostic to the hegemonic binary such as "economic security", "social progress", "democratic development", and "well-being". He argues that these terms have "already enjoy considerable hegemony, even if not in the discourses they seek to subvert" (Glasson 2015, 175). Subversive terms would act as a Trojan horse; they co-opt the governing discourse with terms that cannot be co-opted as has been done with terms such as green growth and sustainable development where green and sustainable are subordinate.

To an extent, I agree. However, I question how sticky this approach could be and recall Dengler and Seebacher's (2019) conclusion — to not only focus on the words but also the values. Terms that have enjoyed considerable hegemony may fall into the master frame of growth and risk reinforcing the values and meanings that the degrowth movement aims to disassociate. Moreover, a Trojan-horse strategy of subversion,

much like "green nudging", also circumvents a deliberative and democratised process (Schubert 2017). Those who are manipulated to accept the new narrative would not have done the transformational work of unlearning and untangling relationship to the social and natural world that would indeed be necessary to transition to a genuinely green and just society. Would subversive strategies, be weighty enough to prevent backsliding to the nationalistic, authoritarian and recession fearing responses in the face of crisis — say another global pandemic? I for one am dubious and suggest novel counter-frames and narratives (such as those enabled through the use of utiopia as a futuring technique) are, at least also, necessary.

For the most part, in its counter-framing and imagery degrowth still centres growth (and with it the associated ideologies they wish to overcome). It is not intuitive in the name, or the argumentation of the actors that degrowth is simply different. The actors in some of the texts took time to discuss and interrogate their arguments with their opponents and allies. Though Kallis, for example, could admit the argument needs work, typically he and other degrowth proponents were unwilling to compromise on the using a "missile word" and provocative discourse. A staunch defence of the word degrowth and justification that it cannot be co-opted can be seen as a barrier to coalition building and the self-reflection called for by decolonial, feminist and post-normal scholars. Though there are merits to a defence of the word degrowth, it is also necessary to scrutinise the possible negative effects of their discourse as I have done.

It is not enough to attack the growth ideology least of all with the same tools used to construct the church, the fetish, the habit. Alternative idea(l)s need to be supported by different ways of thinking and speaking — "New metaphors have the power to create a new reality" (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 14). This means not just poking holes at it but actively constructing alternatives.

Though I have raised caution to the use of war metaphor, Arundhati Roy beautifully articulates a more call to action for those writer-activists like her that can be applied to activists with dual roles in the degrowth movement. She recommends creativity and perseverance through art, music, literature and perhaps lively conferences, protests and collectives. What is more, her words capture that actors are both bound to hegemonic discourses — the ideas and notion of inevitability — actors draw from but can be agentive in resisting or transforming.

Our strategy should be not only to confront empire but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness — and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe.

The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling — their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability.

— Arundhati Roy, War Talk (2003)

Movement intellects, may not directly see their work as *culture jamming* — the creative efforts of artists, poets and performers to foster creative activism and intellectual advocacy, as an antidote to despair (McIntyre 2013). To support advocacy, where appropriate, movement intellects could look to creative and scrappy activists for ideas and include them in their extended peer communities. For example, perhaps they can learn from the "hopepunk" style of activism and identification in which urban activists foster connection and community instead of despair and denial (Innocent 2020). In Rules for Radicals, the pragmatic radical Saul Alinsky (1989) argues that a sense of humour is a key attribute for community organisers and other agents of change — why not intellectual advocates of degrowth too? Moreover, degrowth scholarship can explore how these strategies of activism and lifestyle practices may aid to mobilise more people to the movement (Alexander 2017).

Degrowth scholars can also consider themselves *futures specialists* — having diagnosed the shortcomings of the green growth agenda they are tasked with asking — what next? Jarva (2014, 19) builds on Jerome Bruner's concept of the narrative construction of reality to argue that "it is the role of futures specialists to present and translate paradigmatic ideas into the narrative form to make them understandable to those, who are not familiar with paradigmatic thinking". The post- and degrowth actors may not consider themselves 'futures specialists' let alone advocates when speaking at events, on panels or debating other scholars. However, their argumentation constructs "passive and active (motivational) futures" in the minds of their audiences and readers (Jarva 2014, 21). If degrowth proponents are genuine about growing support for degrowth (or at the very least critique of growth) then they should view public platforms as different from their usual sandboxes and use them as opportunities to mobilise more people to the movement. In their intellectual advocacy, actors can

"seek with others to develop and articulate slogans, myths, and narratives that will be influential in a deep or architectonic sense" (Bruner and Oelschlaeger 1994, 395).

De Geus (2002) suggests utopia can make an inspiring contribution to current environmental debates, particularly in discussions that remain superficial or lacking of imaginative foresight. This is then ideal to engage in discussions that make it difficult to imagine a future that is post-growth or post-fossil fuels (Hajer and Versteeg 2018). Proponents of green growth already leverage a technologically utopic and optimistic imagination even though their proposal is not sufficiently broad and deep to deal with other social and ecological issues. To shift political discourse, degrowth advocates ought not to shy away using utopia futuring device or avoid nowtopian examples of localised initiatives and projects affiliated with degrowth. Moreover, the movement can benefit from utopian imagination in art and literature to inspire and widen the imagination as a strategy to mobalise and recruit people to the movement. It should not be the intention that post-growth becomes a totalitarian future state but rather that degrowth, as a process, uses creativity and imagination. As de Geus (2002, 199) concludes "Certainly, utopia as an 'enforceable and realizable blueprint' has been dead for a long time, but long live the critical, imaginative, and inspiring ecotopian visions in the history of political thought."

8 Conclusions and reflections

To conclude this research thesis, I will return to the problem statement of this thesis and address the research questions. In a *ronda*, I will restate the main themes in this piece of research — the research rationale, methodology as well as a summary of the core arguments and dilemmas I have presented. I will offer my reflections regarding the limitations of this research. I will suggest future research and other lines of enquiry that would be fruitful for understanding degrowth, its transition discourses and movement advocates. Finally, in a *coda*, I will close out my thesis.

8.1.1 Ronda — weaving the dilemmas together

The degrowth movement wishes to dispel growth based thinking and habits from political discourse, the social psyche and the mainstream economics (and with it the associated ideologies that feminist and decolonial critics argue contribute to social and environmental disarray). The degrowth movement is marginal and its discourse has not, had a visible influence on local or international policymaking and institutions. The movement's marginality cannot be explained by its infancy, nor can it be explained by a lack of urgency or necessity — it is about as old as Brundtland sustainable development and ecological modernisation discourse and more robust in terms of its attempt to address multiple complex and uncertain problems. Moreover, a coalition of agents and their allies would need to decentre green growth with new stories and imaginaries about the transition to a post-growth future in its place.

Radical degrowth proponents defend their activist slogan. Allies point to its limitations agree with its underlying assumptions. Pro-growth actors opponents denounce the concept despite sharing concern for decarbonisation, material distribution and the overemphasis on GDP. The disparity of opinions on degrowth is also reflected in a small body of literature from political economy and political ecology disciplines. A few studies use feminist and decolonial insights to critique degrowth. At this time, no peer-reviewed literature takes a discourses analytical approach to explore why the degrowth movement's discourse remains marginal.

To fill a gap in the research, I have observed a debate of David and Goliath proportions and analysed it by weaving together arguments made by actors who are sympathetic

yet critical of the degrowth proposal and its vocabulary for a New Era. More specifically, how social agents in the corpus argue for degrowth should be explored because movement intellects have a degree of influence in academic and political arenas and because discourse contributes to the success or failure of collective action. The corpus chosen was fruitful as it evidences the controversy about the term degrowth and the movement that proposes it.

In this thesis, I set out a number of aims and objectives to guide my analysis of the empirical material. I will next summarise my observations to answer the research questions. *What, if anything, can be learnt about the marginality of degrowth movement from how movement intellectuals debate the degrowth proposal and defend their choice of framing?* In chapter 5, I examined how degrowth makes use of negative framing, that is contested by their opponents and allies outside of the movement. Degrowther's have developed a justification for their framing. It unites degrowth actors as contenders and dissenting agents — regardless of where they may stand on the spectrum. They are underdogs at war with the growth paradigm. Negative framing they the claim cannot be co-opted.

However, the radical counter-position taken by degrowth proponents is argued by some to be incoherent and unhelpful to the aims of the movement (van den Bergh 2011; Glasson 2015; Raworth 2015). I would not agree that a radical discourse is a hindrance purely because it is critical or negatively framed. If degrowth shares post-normal principles with ecological economics, then it would make sense that the goal is not to be predictive but to offer practical ways of thinking (Luks 1998). The degrowth discourse is fruitful *because* it is critical, provocative and challenges the dominant growth paradigm and many of the ideology it subsumes (Demailly 2014).

That said, degrowth is unlikely to ever be a desirable strategy for the leading capital fraction and their immediate allies as it does not serve the interests capital accumulation (Buch-Hansen 2018). Nonetheless, in my analysis, I proposed that there are challenges and creative opportunities for intellectual activists such as those actors in the texts to consider. Through their critique of growth they aim to dispel it from the ecological modernisation zeitgeist and offer an antidote. In its place, they offer degrowth — a simpler, more just way. There is, of course, nothing simple about it. The corpus evidenced the magnitude and complexity of their task. Several actors in

the corpus struggled with framing incongruity as they talked back against the hegemonic growth discourse — they made use of a number of master frames in that do not support the aims of the movement. Discourse incongruity is a significant but insufficient explanation for why the degrowth movement remains marginal.

How can degrowth proponents and allies popularise their movement's vision through their intellectual advocacy? They both are and are not. Such is the paradoxical nature of social movements that are not unified, belong to a coalition of other discourses and counter-hegemonic discourses. In Chapter 6, I used collective identity as an analytical tool to further examine how relational processes between actors shape the degrowth movements discourse.

I explored two cultures behind the degrowth activist-academic. The first draws from standard economic and scientific discourse in order to 'credentialise' themselves. That is, to enact the identity of a credible researcher or voice on the topics discussed in an attempt to be more persuasive and make their legitimate claims permissible for the social context. The second, much like the framing of their argument, is a deviant counter-culture counterforce that challenges growth based thinking as well as standard scientific and economic discourse. Their collective identity is contingent on being against something and someone. They resist the call to be amiable, palatable or cooperative. I illustrated how the mixing of two social languages leads degrowth actors to engage in tightrope talk. In response to the novel and unfamiliar discourse of radical degrowth, the actors attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the scientific work and arguments on which the degrowth movement is based. To reaffirm their legitimacy, degrowthers conform to standard discourse. As they do so, they use economic language and enact identities in non-standard ways. Tightrope talk is fitting to describe what degrowth advocates are attempting to do. Their internal rhetoric must bind and mobilise the groups in the movement but also mobilise new people and attract alliances. Simultaneously, they see a need to prevent co-option by countering the mainstream growth discourse all while engaging in the hegemonic economic genera of discourse to be perceived as authoritative. Yet, the very same discourse they draw upon for credibility can constrain the creative aspects of the discourse for articulating an alternative and pluralist agenda.

This led me to discuss how the degrowth movement wields a double-edged sword. Language and practices that bind certain actors and groups within the movement to have a strong shared identity and solidarity with each other have an equal and opposite force. Collective identity, as observed through the corpus of intellectual advocates, can also all distance the degrowth movement from the potential allies and groups that they have an affinity to. Support from coalitions and public consent is an essential element to a paradigm shift which degrowth does not yet have (Buch-Hansen 2018). However, the staunch defence of degrowth risks alienating non-academic groups, environmental justice in the global south and even their affiliate actors who take issue with the negative framing would.

What can movement intellectuals from degrowth or its coalitions take away from this? As an antidote to theorising that attempts to be neat and tidy, I discussed a number of dilemmas and paradoxes for consideration. For the most part, my conclusions are not intended to be prescriptive. In Chapter 7, I shifted from examining and exploring the degrowth discourse to seeking out practical considerations for advocates for a transformation to a post-growth future. Specifically, I provide reflections for movement intellectuals such as those in the corpus.

To help populate the margins of economic discourse, I encourage degrowthers to reflect on upon their argumentation. Movement advocates may be able to craft more compelling stories and better-quality arguments. I extend the argument that rhetorical self-awareness is necessary to advance the discourse of degrowth as a social movement, political project and intellectual paradigm (Bruner and Oelschlaeger 1994; Luks 1998; McCloskey 1998). To avoid becoming doctrinaire, I argued that Degrowth proponents must evaluate their rhetoric with the same scrutiny they apply to their modelling and methodological work and their testing of policy proposals and lifestyle alternatives. As a post-normal science, the intellectual advocates of the movement should not be closed off to transdisciplinarity. Specifically, to continue to have fruitful conversations that benefit not only the intellectual paradigm but also the popularise the degrowth vision.

Degrowth ideas are deviant and disruptive, so its proponents face resistance while their hybrid ways of speaking and acting are unfamiliar. This need not be a deterrence. Deviance in the form of divergent meanings and unconventional language and

practices is the norm for sciences and institutions in the Anthropocene (Hoffman and Jennings 2015). Moreover, modern environmentalism can benefit from embracing hybrid, pluralistic identities (Anderson 2010). Simultaneously movement actors and groups can engage in and shift between *both* scientific, *and* crafty, defiant modes of advocacy.

Intellectual advocates can learn from their activists in their extended peer communities. They should see that they have a role in mobilising people, building alliances and working with extended peer communities. Degrowth does not aim to be a totalising ideology. Thus, self-awareness is also necessary to avoid the movement from becoming another fetish or co-opted by one of the groups in its spectrum (or by forces outside the movement)(Martínez-Alier et al. 2010). It would be unfortunate if degrowth, which is endorsed by many as having the transformative potential to shift the state of socio-economic and environmental, were to be prompted and researched by actors who are unaware of the effects of their discourse — both the opportunities and challenges.

8.1.2   Reflections and proposed future research

Ultimately other methods of analysis and social research are needed to supplement and build on the transdisciplinary scholarship of the topics discussed here. Moreover, there are methodological and practical limitations to my analysis and further study's about degrowth are necessary. As I have established, discourse is socially situated, and rhetoric involves a persuader and a persuadee. One might ask, why only focus on the social agent's producing texts, why not study the reception and interpretation of the degrowth discourse? Indeed, this is a valid and necessary line of inquiry for future research. I do not intend to discredit this with my choice to scratch below the surface of the degrowth argument to understand and explore the framing effects and collective identity processes of the degrowth movement. It is just one of many choices that lead to the exclusion of other possible research avenues — as Fairclough (2003) says, text analysis is inevitably selective and "there is no such thing as a complete and definitive analysis of a text" (14). The questions one could ask are inexhaustible as global and homegrown transition movements grow and change. The degrowth actors in the texts I analyse call for further development and support for degrowth policies and interventions and modelling their potential impact. So that my findings do not exist in

a vacuum I intend to share a synthesis of the literature and my suggestions in post- and degrowth blogs and publications. It is my intention that these continue to move a fruitful conversation forward about the contribution degrowth can make to a just and genuinely sustainable transition.

In future research, a variety of methodological approaches should be used to understand collective action as a system of relationships and to avoid essentialising the subject (Melucci 1995, 56). Research could entail, for example, movement observations or quantitative studies and other types of actors, not just the academic elites that have been the empirical focus in this thesis. Regarding social movement framing, longitudinal designs may be necessary to observe how the degrowth movement frames change over time (Benford 1997). As degrowth is a project still under development, as it matures, grows and changes new narratives and empirical material are likely to emerge. One can observe what the conditions for such changes are and what effect that has on movement participation and reception.

Additionally, multi-level framing processes (practitioner, academic and organisational variation) and diffusion of frames beyond nation-states (the global adoption and variation) could be applied to degrowth (Benford 1997). Furthermore, future work might ask if the rhetoric of the academic actors 'trickle down' to the grassroots degrowth actors such as practitioners and activists. These questions have yet to be addressed beyond bachelor and master level dissertations which asks how degrowth discourses spread in mainstream and transition town settings (Bähr 2016; Merker 2019).

My analysis has been focused on figures at the centre of the policy and scholarly debate on growth and degrowth. In the methodology chapter, I reflect upon the source material as being overwhelmingly white, elite and male. Thus, I have not resolved Benford's (1997) recommendation that social movement scholars should address elite bias. He suggests doing so by looking beyond movement generated frames and attempt to study the interplay between them and the framings of "rank and file participants, potential recruits, bystanders and others" (421). In order to address this common bias, perpetuated by this research design, future research could focus on non-elite sources of degrowth practices and discourses produced in the everyday lives of more general degrowth proponents and movement actors. For example, from degrowth communities

and projects and understand how the discourses relate to those of the activist-academic elites. Holland, Fox, and Daro (2008) describe this as a decentered study of social movements that is compatible with the analysis of movement processes such as framing, collective identity and discourse. "Through this analytic lens, movements are better seen not as relatively unified actors, but, as multiple sources of cultural discourses competing to inform the everyday actions of movement participants" (97). A decentered approach would also aid to explore the fringe strands and levels of commitment that make up the degrowth movement and post-growth transition discourse more generally. Moreover, centring non-elite, non-white and more culturally diverse voices would be appropriate to help respond to the critiques of feminist and decolonial scholars raised in this thesis.

I have drawn from feminist and decolonial literature on degrowth to support my critical analysis of the movement's intellectual advocates. However, I have not explicitly used these theories and methodologies in my research design. In keeping with the principles of pluralism in post-normal sciences, future research, by degrowth scholars and critics, should also include non-colonial ontologies and decolonising methodologies in the research paradigm. Moreover, there is a place to incorporate emancipatory and intersectionality principles into degrowth scholarship. Producing knowledge and giving a voice to marginalised and underrepresented people could assist degrowth scholarship to avoid reproducing power asymmetries. Firstly, by better understand the limits of discourse among specific groups or places and vice versa, the movement may be able to build bridges between degrowth proponents and potential alliances beyond the Western or European context. Secondly, to centre degrowth's ethos of justice and meaning of life (Demaria et al. 2013) intersectionality principles in research can ensure multiplicity in the rediscovery of human identity and prospects for a new ecological consciousness (Eckersley 1992).

8.1.3   Coda — closing remarks

I have composed this thesis under global pandemic conditions that have imbued in public awareness that many communities lack economic resilience and social protections. A great deal of political and economic minds are locked into conversations that attempt to find policies for socio-economic change. Social and environmental movements have, for decades, been giving voice to modernity's complex relationship

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with the natural environment. The degrowth movement shares a vision, with other heterodox groups, for a society that is connected to nature, celebrates sufficiency and organised to care about wellbeing on the planet. Though these groups are marginal, their aspirations are not. It is pertinent to wonder — how, if at all, will the multiplicity of dreams about a more just and sustainable future be told into reality? With difficulty! But try we must.

Agents of change would need to use all the tools at their disposal for their visions to become real. The stories we tell shape the world. Degrowth has an epic story to tell about civilisational transformation. The deconstruction of a modernist imaginary also entails repairing and thickening alternative narratives. On the part of those with a credible voice and platform of influence, it would take boldness and creativity to defy dominant frames. A broad coalition of alliances, sharing compelling stories and promoting nowtopian projects would give colour, texture and variety to an otherwise elusive and abstract dream.

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