

DEGROWTH: A CONTROVERSIAL ETHICAL AND POLITICAL STANCE IN  
ENVIRONMENTALISM

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IN ENVIRONMENTALISM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **DEGROWTH: A CONTROVERSIAL ETHICAL AND POLITICAL STANCE IN ENVIRONMENTALISM**

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Environmental concerns worldwide have increased in recent years, especially concerning global warming and climate change. Feeling the impending threat of planetary collapse, the idea of degrowth has been introduced as a solution to the ecological crisis. This work aims to analyze degrowth as a political and ethical stance in the field of environmentalism, discussing whether degrowth can be suggested as a viable solution to the current ecological crisis.

In this study, I assert that modern-day environmentalism has been stuck in a deadlock and is far from offering a realistic solution to the ecological crisis due to the wrong-headed policies of the liberal approach. In this sense, blaming one's own consumption for causing the crisis and focusing solely on individual carbon footprint analysis will be criticized for deliberately misleading people.

Indicating the capitalist mode of production as the primary cause of environmental degradation, I argue that ecological problems cannot be solved without a radical change in the capitalist mode of production. Since capitalism's continuous

exploitation of labor and plundering of nature are not separate issues, I think the ecological struggle should be a part of the struggle for social liberation against capitalism.

To conclude, I assert that degrowth's ultimate goal of maintaining ecological and social well-being through downscaling in the usage of material throughput and energy can be supported. Nevertheless, with its various problems and ambiguities, I think degrowth cannot be proposed as a realizable solution to the current ecological crisis.

**Keywords:** Environmentalism, degrowth, capitalism, climate change.

## ÖZ

### KÜÇÜLME: ÇEVRECİLİK ALANINDA TARTIŞMALI BİR ETİK VE POLİTİK DURUŞ

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Son yıllarda dünya genelinde, özellikle küresel ısınma ve iklim değişikliği ile ilgili çevresel kaygılar artmıştır. Bu bağlamda, gezegensel çöküşün yaklaşan tehdidinin hissedilmesiyle, ekolojik krize bir çözüm olarak küçülme fikri ortaya atılmıştır. Bu çalışma, çevrecilik alanında politik ve etik bir duruş olarak küçülmeyi analiz etmeyi ve küçülmenin mevcut ekolojik krize uygulanabilir bir çözüm olarak önerilip önerilemeyeceğini tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, günümüz çevreciliğinin liberal yaklaşımın yanlış politikaları nedeniyle bir çıkmaza girdiğini ve ekolojik krize gerçekçi bir çözüm sunmaktan uzak olduğunu iddia ediyorum. Bu anlamda, ekolojik krize neden olduğu için kişinin kendi tüketimini suçlaması ve yalnızca bireysel karbon ayak izi analizine odaklanması, insanları kasıtlı olarak yanlış yönlendirdiği için eleştirilecektir.

Çevresel bozulmanın başlıca nedeni olarak kapitalist üretim tarzını göstererek, ekolojik sorunların kapitalist üretim tarzında köklü bir değişiklik yapılmadan çözülemeyeceğini savunuyorum. Kapitalizmin süreklileşmiş emek sömürüsü ve doğa

talanı birbirinden ayrı meseleler olmadığından, ekoloji mücadelesinin kapitalizme karşı toplumsal kurtuluş mücadelesinin bir parçası olması gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Sonuç olarak, küçülmenin malzeme ve enerji kullanımında ölçek küçültme yoluyla ekolojik ve sosyal refahı sürdürme nihai hedefinin desteklenebileceğini iddia ediyorum. Bununla birlikte, çeşitli sorunları ve belirsizlikleri nedeniyle, küçülmenin mevcut ekolojik krize karşı gerçekleştirilebilir bir çözüm olarak önerilemeyeceğini savunuyorum.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çevrecilik, küçülme, kapitalizm, iklim değişikliği.

*To the ones dreaming of a world of equity, justice, and freedom...*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“The fight to save the climate and the fight for better living and working conditions are one and the same.”<sup>1</sup>

Environmental concerns worldwide have increased in recent years, especially regarding global warming and climate change. Feeling the risk of a burning planet due to the ecological crisis, the relationship between humans and nature is questioned more than ever. In this regard, a discussion of the responsibilities of human beings both toward the natural environment and future generations is at the top of the agenda. Moreover, the culprits for the current catastrophic environmental situation are also a matter of debate. Consequently, the effort to search for appropriate methods and to take action to stop environmental degradation is perpetually developing. Considering the seriousness of the ecological crisis as a fact and focusing on the issue of climate change as a matter of urgency, environmental movements are also progressing, and various political and ethical standpoints in the field are being introduced.

Environmental issues have many ethical, political, technological, and economic aspects; thus, we must scrutinize the discourse in this sphere through multidisciplinary lenses. Similarly, environmental movements hold various theoretical backgrounds fed by different political and ethical approaches. The idea of degrowth, as a political and moral stance, has arisen and grown with the contention of such versatility in this realm of environmentalism under these circumstances. For many scholars, degrowth has ushered in a new age in modern-day environmentalist

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<sup>1</sup> John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift*. 1999.

movements. Therefore, I believe the idea of degrowth is worth analyzing when dealing with environmental problems and searching for viable solutions to ecological breakdown.

This study will mainly be an effort to analyze degrowth in the field of environmentalism. Throughout my work, I will examine the degrowth idea in detail—with its arguments, suggestions, strengths, deadlocks, drawbacks, weaknesses, and critics—aiming to take an ethical and political standpoint regarding the current ecological crisis. I see degrowth as a controversial political and/or ethical stance because of its complexity, heterogeneity, and the ambiguities it comprises. Each time during my analysis, without ignoring the moral side of it, I will strongly stress the political dimension of degrowth since I think politics determines the way that human beings relate to nature. Besides, the political decisions create the ecological problems that we encounter today. Hence, the main part of my thesis will be given in Chapters 4 and 5, in which the idea of degrowth will be politically discussed and criticized. Therefore, discussing these two chapters first and then giving information about Chapters 2 and 3 would be better.

Chapter 4 will elaborate on the question, “What is degrowth?” In this chapter, I plan to start by presenting some definitions of degrowth from various degrowth scholars and proponents. Given the richness of degrowth literature and its multidisciplinary nature with various aspects, I will reference several scholars with different political perspectives in this field. Furthermore, the historical development of the degrowth concept will be explored. Then, I will move on to discuss the growth imperative of capitalism, as degrowth presents a significant challenge to the hegemony of growth. Here, I regard the debate on the relationship between economic growth and capitalism as a core element of degrowth’s political stance. In other words, I will show how degrowth addresses the relationship between capitalism and growth. In the following sections of Chapter 4, concrete suggestions from degrowth proponents, as well as the goals of the degrowth idea, will be presented. I argue that one should consider the realizability and applicability of these suggestions within the current dominant system, namely capitalism. I believe this discussion will greatly enhance our understanding of the political stance of degrowth proponents.

As a newly emerging idea/stance/theory<sup>2</sup> in this field, I think there are also several significant problems related to degrowth. In this regard, degrowth is exposed to heavy criticism from different perspectives. Chapter 5 will deal with these problems and try to present some criticisms of degrowth from a Marxist perspective. This chapter will include not only critiques of some socialist scholars and writers dealing with ecology but also my own perspective and interpretation. In this chapter, my main purpose is to put forth the ambiguities and deadlocks of the degrowth idea. Considering the uncertainties of degrowth and through the examination of various criticisms, I aim to discuss the applicability/realizability of degrowth policies under the political hegemony of the capitalist system. In this sense, whether degrowth can serve as an adequate strategy to address the accelerating ecological crisis will be questioned.

This discussion will yield insights into the methodology and agency problem in degrowth, which will also be examined throughout Chapter 5. In other words, how can degrowth policies be effectively implemented? What are the means to achieve the ends, and are the means justifiable? Furthermore, what is the appropriate subject to attain the goals of degrowth? I will attempt to provide thoughtful answers to these questions by exploring the proposed methods and agency within the idea of degrowth through various scholars, followed by presenting my own perspective. I will argue in this section that degrowth policies, as such, cannot be executed without a fundamental change in the capitalist mode of production (a social and political revolution). Another point of my criticism towards degrowth will focus on the issues arising from the stark contrast between different geographical and social strata worldwide. In other words, I believe that degrowth does not adequately address geographic and social distinctions.

Finally, at the end of Chapter 5, the differences and similarities between degrowth arguments and theses of socialism will be construed. In this section, I will cluster around the arguments of some prominent scholars, such as Giorgos Kallis, Jason Hickel, Güney Işıkara, and Matthew Huber, comparing the theory and praxis of

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<sup>2</sup> Is degrowth a theory, an idea, or is it just a metaphor? I will try to discuss this issue in Chapter 4. For now, I will prefer using the term as a stance or an idea.

socialism and degrowth policies. I especially consider this part crucial in my work since I defend that the ultimate goals of the degrowth idea on its own are valuable. However, I argue that these goals—maintaining social well-being for all and staying compatible with nature—can only be achieved in a socialist world system, which is based on production for the basic needs of the masses, not for the sake of capitalists' interests. In this sense, I believe that degrowth thinkers should combine their critique of capitalism with the theory and praxis of socialism to obtain a viable solution to the ecological crisis. Nevertheless, I think that most of the degrowth proponents deliberately refrain from explicitly arguing for socialism while they are imagining a post-capitalist society without the growth imperative. This is one of the inadequacies in degrowth literature that I want to go over.

To examine any environmental idea/theory properly, I think we should also contemplate the human approach to nature. Therefore, another anchor of my study is the discussion of human beings' relationship with nature and the ethical discourse in this field. When environmental degradation stands in front of us as a reality at various headstones, and once humans start to worry about the future of the planet and the human species, the question of what must be done comes into the scene. I think this question is not just about moral attitudes but a matter of diverse, tangled social and political interactions. Talking about ecological problems and the possibility of an ecological way of life necessarily brings us to the political arena. Therefore, I believe a political analysis is inevitable for a comprehensive review of humans' approach to nature. This topic will be explored in Chapter 2, which discusses the Marxist approach to the human-nature relationship. In this part, I will appeal to some early writings of Marx and Engels and contemporary Marxist scholars like John Bellamy Foster, Sibel Özbudun, Temel Demirer, Kohei Saito, and Jason Hickel. I think this chapter will also help us elaborate on the role of philosophy in environmental issues; in other words, I will try to expand on what is philosophical here in this part of my study. Another point in this chapter will be about the responsibilities of human beings towards nature. For instance, do moral claims in the field of environmental philosophy place responsibility on humans? Then again, can morality per se be a proper tool to avoid environmental degradation and save the planet, or do we need a certain political stance to change the worsening situation?

When we look through Chapter 3, a critical analysis of modern-day environmentalism will be seen. My study here will be an effort to search for the cause of the impasse in today's environmental movements. I think this part is particularly important, for environmental struggles are strongly growing both in the Global North and Global South, and some of them have an engagement with the arguments of degrowth. First, via some information about climate change indicators and the current situation in the ecological crisis, I will try to discuss whether humanity is on the threshold of a planetary apocalypse. Second, together with the examination of some popular climate activism groups, I will defend that liberal views in the field of environmentalism have a significant role in the deadlock we see in environmentalism. I argue that the liberal approaches in the arena consider a uniform humanity, ignoring the economic, social, and geographic distinctions. Besides, they mainly focus on individualistic precautions/solutions. In this regard, I believe they are far from properly tackling the current ecological crisis.

In this part, capitalism's responsibility and culpability in environmental crimes will be shown. I think this culpability is hidden behind the logic of the capitalist system, which moves in line with the interests of capital rather than the needs of the masses. Aiming to put forward a study of political ecology leavened with Marxism, my ultimate point here is to disclose the role of capitalism in ecological problems by targeting the capitalist mode of production as the primary suspect of environmental degradation. I argue that the ecological crisis cannot be solved within capitalism because capitalism's continuous exploitation of labor and plundering of nature are not separate issues. Hence, the ecological struggle should be a part of the struggle for social liberation against capitalism. In this regard, I will try to answer the following questions in this chapter: Why are we encountering such serious environmental problems, and who is to blame for the environmental degradation? Concerning the environmental problems, can it be argued that we, humanity, have not fulfilled our responsibilities toward the natural environment?

Last of all, my personal approach to the idea of degrowth will be given in Chapter 6. Together with a summary of what has been discussed so far and a detailed analysis of degrowth, I will discuss whether degrowth can be offered as an adequate strategy for

the current impasse in environmentalism. Considering the globality of the consequences of climate change, I will also ponder what can be done to save the planet and leave a sustainable life for future generations. As a Marxist dealing with environmental issues, I find the idea of degrowth and its ultimate goals quite noticeable. I allege that degrowth's goals and suggestions, such as social well-being for the masses, reduced working hours, fair distribution, equity of opportunity, and production for the needs of the people, can be supported. Nevertheless, degrowth, as such, seems to be insufficient to solve the current environmental and social crisis. I argue that this crisis is created by the very structure of the capitalist mode of production, and degrowth's goal of ecological and social well-being is incompatible with the pursuit of perpetual growth in capitalism. However, degrowth thinkers do not clearly discuss an alternative model when they are negating capitalism. In this regard, I believe that a strong emphasis on the need for socialism should be explicitly made while supporting the goals of degrowth.

In my work, I argue for a class perspective while discussing solutions to environmental problems. Moreover, I think the importance and necessity of solidarity between struggles in different fields against exploitation, repression, and inequalities should be clearly mentioned. In this sense, collective political action is a *sine qua non* for freedom, equality, and environmental and social justice.

## CHAPTER 2

### HUMAN BEINGS' RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE AND THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

“No matter what ethical norms we choose to embrace, if we want to solve environmental problems, we must find a way to translate those norms into policy.”<sup>3</sup>

Considering the prevalent environmental problems threatening life on the planet, the question of how human beings are related to nature is worth discussing. In this regard, human beings' responsibilities toward the natural environment are also a matter of consideration in today's ecological studies.

Regarding the question of what is philosophical / what has philosophy got to do in the field of environmentalism, Sarkar (2012, p. 5) says “the aims of academic environmental disciplines such as integrity, sustainability, diversity, and fidelity are imbued with the discussion of cultural norms; and normativity is inherently philosophical.” Furthermore, philosophical arguments help identify which values and norms we should embrace and to what extent we can do that. In this sense, Sarkar (2012, p. 28) states that there exists a relationship between environmental philosophy and ethics, and environmental ethics is based on the question of why the environment should be protected.

Environmental issues pave the way for significant questions about responsibility, accountability, equity, and justice. For instance, Jamieson (2008, p. 6) argues that environmental problems strongly challenge human value systems and ethical discussions. According to Jamieson, the role of philosophy in the environmental

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<sup>3</sup> Sahotra Sarkar. *Environmental Philosophy*. 2012.

degradation we face today is to create an awareness of the situation and question the relationship between man and nature in this context. Nevertheless, Jamieson also says that “even if there were no environmental problems, there would still be a place for reflecting on ethics and the environment” (ibid). On the one hand, Jamieson seems right to me; without facing any serious and palpable problems, human beings could still deal with moral concepts such as respect, guilt, accountability, and responsibility regarding environmental issues. On the other hand, it is a fact that the environmental debate and the ethical discussions concerning the human-nature relationship have widened after global ecological problems have been noticed by different layers of society.

Likewise, Desjardins (2013, p. xii) argues that ecological controversies make us question our values, our place in nature, how we human beings should live, and in what kind of world we might flourish. According to him, environmental challenges such as global warming and climate change have a special role in environmental philosophy in the sense that fundamental political and ethical questions have been raised with the help of these concepts (ibid., p. xii). Moreover, Desjardins indicates that philosophers working in the field of environmentalism need a more radical philosophical approach to environmental issues, including political, ethical, metaphysical, and epistemological concepts (ibid., p. 5). For instance, the moral stance of human beings for future generations and non-human forms of life, and the exploration of the nature of species and ecosystems should have a point in epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics (ibid., p. 8). In this sense, Desjardin says, “every position staked out in an environmental controversy will involve philosophical assumptions” (ibid., p. 8). Similarly, I argue that the dimensions of environmental issues are not limited to any single discipline; rather, we are dealing with a wide range of scientific and philosophical branches.

Furthermore, I consider that there exists an inseparable relationship between environmental issues, ethics, and political philosophy regarding the question of how humans are related to nature. Humans’ activities and interventions in nature, their responsibilities to the natural environment, and the actions taken following these responsibilities are real ethical matters of concern. Moreover, I think one should also

elaborate on whether and to what extent human beings bear responsibilities to preserve and sustain the stability of nature. In this sense, Demir (2020, p. 1) expresses that different environmental arguments are all searching for the answer to whether humans should use the environment for their well-being. If the answer is yes, he continues, then how far can human beings go? In response to these questions, Demir argues that human beings for sure have to use the natural environment for themselves to exist and survive. However, he claims that no definite and satisfying answer to the second question—how far they can go in this intervention and usage—has been given yet (ibid).

In environmental discussions, I believe that the main point of the actors, including philosophers and environmentalists, is to determine and put forward a proper approach to nature that would help humans preserve the continuity of life in the world. In other words, social and ecological well-being should be maintained and bequeathed to future generations. This approach should hold appropriate ethical and political stances. For instance, relating ethics and environment, Leopold mentions that “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community” (Leopold, 1949, p. 224). Similarly, Callicott asks the following question: “How can we inhabit the global comprehensive system without defiling it and live it alive and undamaged?” (Callicott, 2013, p. 210). At this stage, it is required to put forth which approaches and actions of humans may help avert the degradation of the environment and which ones cannot be an adequate solution to the colossal global threat posed by the ecological crisis.

Concerning human beings’ approach to nature, Jamieson (2008) mentions that when humans consider themselves as a part of nature, humans’ feelings of responsibility and respect for nature are stimulated. In the realm of environmentalism, it is often argued in the same manner that when human beings notice that they are interrelated to nature, they have strong moral barriers preventing them from exploiting and damaging the ecosystem. Nevertheless, I find this assertion insufficient in explaining the harm done to nature today. In other words, I think it would be misleading to construe the exploitation of nature only through moral perspectives. In this sense, the following question arises: Can morality per se be a proper tool to avoid

environmental degradation, or do we need a definite political stance to change the worsening situation?

In a world full of injustice, inequality, and repression, it is a matter of debate whether an individual can live ethically. I argue that the discussion of the possibility of an ecological way of life necessarily brings us to the political arena. The environmental problems that we face today are beyond the realm of ethics. In other words, although a proper ethical approach to nature is a *sine qua non* for environmental concerns, I do not think that crimes against nature can be explained solely by ethics. I believe that the moral approaches of human beings to nature may determine their activities and the corresponding impacts of humans on the natural environment to some extent. However, when we consider such colossal ecological problems, these individual and moral attitudes will not have a significant effect on the preservation of nature. Instead, we should focus on the policies. For instance, let us consider the recent well-known environmental massacres of Akbelen Forest<sup>4</sup> and Kazdağları National Park<sup>5</sup> in Turkey performed by big mining and energy corporations. What lies behind this enormous environmental harm? Can we say that when the decision-makers/rulers approved these crimes, there was a lack of or misuse of moral values for respecting and saving the natural environment? Or can we argue that we are encountering serious environmental problems all over the world since we, humanity, have not fulfilled our responsibilities toward nature?

In this study, while exploring the idea of degrowth in various aspects, I plan to appeal to Marxism's arguments because I believe that Marxism gives us the proper methods to deal with ecological problems, showing us the causes, interactions, culprits, and possible solutions. For instance, Tetreault describes the Marxist approach to environmental issues as “the need to view environmental problems through class-differentiating lenses and as a consequence of the inherent contradictions of capitalist development with its imperative of economic growth” (Tetreault 2017, p. 5).

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<sup>4</sup> Akbelen Forest: A resistance by local people of a town against expanding a coal mining project with deforestation of the area has been performed in Mugla, a province in the Mediterranean Region of Turkey.

<sup>5</sup> Kazdaglari: A National Park in the Eagean Region of Turkey under a serious threat of annihilation due to the extensive mining projects.

To begin with, once we elaborate on the Marxist discourse for the human-nature relationship, we can notice a definite emphasis laid on the interaction between humans and nature; in other words, it is strongly argued that humans are a part of nature. For instance, Roberts (2020, p. 103), referring to the *German Ideology* of Marx and Engels, alleges that a continuous interaction exists within nature, and nature is subject to social relations. Hence, one cannot separate nature from the social relations of human society (ibid). In Marxism, nature, like society, is considered a dialectical process entirely of change and contradiction. Likewise, Özbudun and Demirer (2024) express that, for Marxists, human society is inextricably linked to the natural world, but humans also affect this world with their activities through labor. Since the extent of human impact on their environment depends on how production is organized, the magnitude of change in the natural world has differed throughout history (ibid).

In his well-known work, *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels states that humans belong to nature, and our mastery of nature only consists of our advantage over all other beings in knowing and applying its laws:

At every step, we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature; but that we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws (Engels, 1886, p. 81).

I see a similar approach in Leopold's masterpiece, *A Sand County Almanac*. Leopold defines humans as plain members and citizens of the land community, not conquerors of it (Leopold 1949, p. 204). However, capitalists have made an effort to destroy this story about nature. I think that in capitalism, humans' dominance over nature is strongly asserted, so that it would not be seen as immoral to exploit natural resources for the interests of capitalist monopolies. In this sense, it can be argued that a form of dichotomy between nature and humans has also arisen with capitalism, claiming that humans are separated from nature. Hickel (2020a) mentions that seeing the world as such is a form of philosophical dualism, and we have inherited these ideas from a long line of thinkers, from Plato to Descartes. For Hickel, this dualist philosophy is responsible for today's ecological crisis, and it is related to the arguments of capitalism:

Those of us who live in capitalist societies today have been taught to believe that there is a fundamental distinction between humans and nature: humans are separate from and superior to nature; humans are subjects with spirit, mind, and agency, whereas nature is an inert, mechanistic object. This way of seeing the world is known as dualism. We inherit these ideas from a long line of thinkers, from Plato to Descartes, who primed us to believe that humans can rightfully exploit nature and subject it to our control. We didn't always believe these things. In fact, those who sought to pave the way for capitalism in the sixteenth century first had to destroy other, more holistic ways of seeing the world and either convince or force people to become dualists. Dualist philosophy is responsible at a deep level for our ecological crisis (Hickel 2020a, p. 25).

Hickel argues that dualist thought became mainstream for the first time during the Enlightenment and “has given sanction to the enclosure and privatization of common land under capitalism” (ibid., p. 57). Indeed, this is the rise of capitalist accumulation. He considers this dualist approach, the corresponding separation of humans and nature, a direct attack on the principles of animist philosophy as well. Furthermore, Hickel refers to Immanuel Kant, who argues that human beings have no direct duties to non-humans, considering these non-human beings merely the means to an end. Hickel states that, for Kant, the end is the man itself (ibid., p. 58).

I think that the idea of the separation of humans from nature leads people to legitimize/justify the right of men's domination of nature. Actually, this is what the capitalist ideology tries to impose on people; in other words, through this dualism, capitalism aims to make people consent to its plundering of nature for the sake of profit. This is because capitalism pursues not only the exploitation of human labor but also of nature to obtain a surplus. Likewise, in the People's Agreement of Cochabamba<sup>6</sup>, the capitalist mode of production has been charged with the separation of human beings from nature:

The capitalist system has imposed on us a logic of competition, progress, and limitless growth. This regime of production and consumption seeks profit without limits, separating human beings from nature and imposing a logic of domination upon nature, transforming everything into commodities: water, earth, the human genome, ancestral cultures, biodiversity, justice, ethics, the rights of peoples, and life itself (WPCC 2010).

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<sup>6</sup> In April 2010, more than 30,000 people from over 100 countries took part in the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in the central Bolivian city of Cochabamba. The final declaration of the conference is known as People's Agreement of Cochabamba.

Demir (2020, p. 4) articulates in the same manner that under capitalism, the will of humans to dominate nature is not an unexpected attitude since capitalists exploit other human beings as well. As an objection to capitalism's arguments of humans' domination over nature, Engels mentions that bringing humans up against nature is anti-natural and senseless:

<...> In particular, after the mighty advances of natural science in the present century, we are more and more getting to know, and hence control, even the more remote natural consequences at least of our more ordinary productive activities. But the more this happens, the more will men not only feel, but also know, their unity with nature, and thus the more impossible will become the senseless and antinatural idea of a contradiction between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body, such as arose in Europe after the decline of classical antiquity and which obtained its highest elaboration in Christianity (Engels 1886, p. 89).

Engels argues that when humans position themselves against nature, consider nature as their enemy, and make themselves ready to fight nature, a risk of unexpected results can occur as well. According to Engels, when humans try to conquer nature, nature takes revenge, and this is a serious threat (Engels 1886, p. 81). Hickel (2020a, p. 66) points to the same threat of seeing the world as an enemy—something that needs to be fought and subdued by the forces of science and reason—and states that this ethic inherited from Descartes has remained profoundly entrenched in our culture.

For Marx and Engels (1845, p. 61), the possibility of ending the contradiction between humans and nature, created by the capitalist ideology, and bringing about some level of harmony and ecological balance would only be possible with the abolition of the capitalist mode of production. As Engels expresses: “To carry out this control requires something more than mere knowledge. It requires a complete revolution in our hitherto existing mode of production and with it of our whole contemporary social order” (Engels 1896, p. 89). In this regard, Marx theorized a rupture in the metabolic interaction between humanity and the rest of nature (metabolic rift theory) emanating from capitalist agricultural production and the growing division between town and country. For many scholars in ecological studies, social metabolism and the metabolic rift are Karl Marx's key concepts concerning the environmental destruction created by capitalism. John Bellamy Foster, a well-known

Marxist academic and ecologist who articulates the metabolic rift theory, states that according to Marx (1887), the metabolic harmony that existed between humans and nature before capitalism was broken by the capitalist mode of production, which is always in pursuit of profit and surplus value (Foster 1999, p. 373). During the development of capitalism, a metabolic rift between human beings and nature has occurred as a consequence. At this stage, natural resources have been overused, and this process has led to harming the atmosphere and the warming of the Earth. According to Foster (2023a, p. 93), the human relation toward nature is a metabolic one; we appropriate energy and material resources from the environment as a basis for life, metabolize this in our bodies, and return the waste to the earth. He mentions that human beings' relation to nature takes the form of a social metabolism exercised primarily through the labor and production process. Foster articulates that nature in this capitalist system is no longer seen as a relation to which we belong but something to be conquered and treated as "a free gift to capital" (ibid., p. 91). Again, Foster and Burkett (2023, p. 9) argue that this metabolic rift and the ecological crisis have also resulted in an alienation of humans from nature under capitalism.

Like other Marxists, Empson (2024) explicates in the same manner that a dialectical relationship between nature and humanity has characterized the history of human beings. He also mentions the role of labor in changing nature and society, arguing that throughout history, humans have transformed nature to satisfy their needs through labor. For Empson, capitalism has transformed humans' relationship with nature in line with the interests of capital. Referring to the alienation of humans from nature due to the relations of production in capitalism, Empson (2024) appeals to Karl Marx's precious work, *Grundrisse*: "For the first time, nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility." According to Empson (ibid), the economic activity of human beings in capitalism led to a systematic deterioration of the environment and excessive use of natural resources. He defends his argument by expressing that the motive force of capitalism is to maximize profit rather than the rational use of resources to benefit humanity.

Emphasizing the importance of sustainability for future generations, Marx indicates the absurdity of the private ownership of the world as follows:

From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like *boni patres familias*, they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition (Marx 1959, p. 510).

While discussing the human-nature relationship concerning the ecological crisis, humans' intervention in nature and the transformation of nature due to human activities are important aspects to be focused on. In today's environmental discourse, it is widely stated that human activity for the purpose of production and development is directly responsible for the harm done to nature. In this sense, humans' interference with nature is often considered to be the ultimate cause of the ecological breakdown. However, I think all human activity related to production and reproduction is an exchange and interaction between humans and nature, and in this sense, not all interventions in nature can be considered pernicious. Humans are part of nature, and the interference of humans in nature is inevitable since nature provides a use-value for all living organisms to keep living. For instance, Özbudun and Demirer (2024) argue that we should not discuss whether humans should intervene in nature or not; instead, we should discuss how, for what purposes, and on what ethical basis humans should intervene in nature. Likewise, according to Finley, it is not appropriate to see human intervention in nature as destructive since the current environmental degradation is caused not by individual humans but by the prevailing system of capitalism and the hierarchical social organization (Andreucci and Engel-Di Mauro 2019, p. 184).

Marxists argue that labor has a transformative effect within this interaction; humans relate to nature and produce their physical environment through labor. For example, Engels, stressing the transformative impacts of humans' activity over nature through labor, states that through labor, man creates himself as well (Engels 1886, p. 81). Similarly, Özbudun and Demirer (2024) state that human labor not only controls and transforms the natural forces it encounters but also changes itself as a result of this activity. According to them, the interaction between nature and humans takes on a destructive form not by itself, but rather, the destruction occurs in the capitalist mode of production. This is because capital exploits nature to expand itself to such an extent that the balance between nature and man is broken (ibid).

Marx has profoundly worked on humans' interaction with nature in his well-known study, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. For example, he argues that man produces the whole of nature following the laws of beauty, in line with his will and consciousness, and this is what distinguishes man from animals:

<...> Man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness. He has a conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life activity. Only because of that is he a species-being. Or, rather, he is a conscious being – i.e., his own life is an object for him, only because he is a species being. Only because of that is his activity-free activity. Estranged labor reverses the relationship so that man, just because he is a conscious being, makes his life activity, his essential being, a mere means for his existence (Marx 1977, p. 73).

According to Marx (*ibid.*, p. 107), history is the creation of men by human labor. Man's relation to nature is directly his relation to men, and his relation to men is directly his relation to nature. For Marx, communism is the positive transcendence of private property and human self-alienation, and it is, therefore, the return of man to himself as a social being, a complete and conscious return of all previous development (*ibid.*, p. 97). Marx sees communism as the absolute resolution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man: “It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individuals and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution” (*ibid.*, p. 97).

Moraes (2014), considering the role of human labor in the process of nature's transformation, argues that even when we presume to be witnessing nature in its purity, we may actually be witnessing culture and history. Marx and Engels (1845, p. 19), in the same manner, criticize Feuerbach in his famous cherry tree example, articulating that “even the objects of the simplest sensuous certainty are not things given directly from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industrial and social development.”

I argue that humans' relationship with nature is a matter of both moral and political stances. Even though this relationship has a deep history, I think the ecological crisis

that we face today has deepened the awareness of environmental issues in society, and people's worries about planetary sustainability and the survival of future generations have severely increased significantly. These concerns have also aroused interest both in ecological studies and environmentalist movements, with various political and ethical considerations. In this regard, theoretical and practical initiatives have been developed to react to the worsening situation. In the following chapter, I will try to analyze modern-day environmentalism and the problems related to today's environmental discourse. I argue that the liberal approach, with its wrong-headed arguments and policies, is still dominant in the environmental discourse, and it misleads the masses concerning the causes and solutions of the environmental breakdown. Besides, I think that some radical and anti-capitalist environmental movements/struggles do not meet the interests of the masses as well, and this leads to an impasse in the arena.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PROBLEM OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE IMPASSE IN TODAY'S ENVIRONMENTALISM

“The only truth is that it is more important for a capitalist to lose their profit than to lose the glaciers.”<sup>7</sup>

Shotwell says that when we think about the climate and future of the world, things can get very depressing:

Global warming is one paradigm case for recognizing our entanglement, becoming overwhelmed, and defaulting to the kind of politics of despair that can result from the recognition that individual purity or actions aiming toward it are not going to solve the collective, complex problems in which we are differentially complicit (Shotwell 2016, p. 202).

Similarly, Löwy (2023) defines today's ecological crisis as the most important social and political question of the twenty-first century, expressing that this crisis will decide the future of the planet and humanity in the coming decades.

Concerning the global risk posed by climate change, this chapter will deal with modern-day environmentalism—the discourse, movements, and counter-reactions—and discuss the problems that I see in today's ecological struggle. I argue that the term ‘impasse’ is appropriate to designate the current deadlock in environmental activism. One of my purposes here is to draw attention to the misleading of the masses by liberal minds in academia, institutions, and climate movements, and to discuss the reasons for this impasse in environmentalism. At the beginning of this chapter, the issue of climate change as a scientific fact will be introduced. Second, the culprits of the current environmental destruction will be discussed, and

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<sup>7</sup> Sibel Özbudun and Temel Demirer, *Nature, Marxist Ecology and Socialism*, 2024.

accountability concerning environmental problems will be put forth. In this sense, I aim to examine the role of capitalism in the ecological crisis, arguing that the capitalist mode of production is the ultimate cause of the current worsening situation. Here, I will object to the liberal approaches in today's environmental discourse, which keep people away from discussing the role of the dominant economic system in environmental crimes. At the end of this chapter, some popular climate groups and movements will be given and analyzed through the lens of my criticism.

### **3.1. Climate Change: A Scientific Fact**

In recent environmental debates, global climate change has had a peculiar and unignorable significance. According to the definition of the United Nations, climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Scientific information reveals that the increase in the amount of greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere, mainly due to the burning of massive amounts of fossil fuels, leads to the warming of the Earth, triggering global climate change. Drought in Africa, intensive heatwaves across Europe, uncontrollable fires in southern Europe, Australia, and North America, and heavy rains/floods in Asia: these events can all be indicators of the climate change we face today. For instance, according to scientific research posted by ZDF Heute Journal<sup>8</sup>, global temperatures in January 2024 have been recorded as the highest value since the beginning of the temperature measurements. The average January temperature in 2024 was 1,66 degrees higher than the average January temperature between the years 1850 and 1900. As a result of global warming, species are also endangered and becoming extinct, and we face the destruction of habitats.

I think the peculiarity of global climate change has three aspects. First, it can be argued that environmental concerns among people have deepened through the awareness of this fact. Second, climate change has a planetary scale and impact. Third, the consideration of human activities as the driver of climate change led us to question extensively how humans are related to nature. Thus, I believe that both the

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<sup>8</sup> ZDF Heute Journal is a German television news broadcast.

ethical and political approaches to today's environmental problems cannot be discussed without considering climate change.

Expressing concerns about the future of humanity, the People's Agreement of Cochabamba puts forward the expected consequences of global warming as follows:

If global warming increases by more than 2 degrees Celsius, a situation that the 'Copenhagen Accord' could lead to, there is a 50 % probability that the damages caused to our Mother Earth will be completely irreversible. Between 20 % and 30 % of species would be in danger of disappearing. Large extensions of forests would be affected, droughts and floods would affect different regions of the planet, deserts would expand, and the melting of the polar ice caps and the glaciers in the Andes and Himalayas would worsen. Many island states would disappear, and Africa would suffer an increase in temperature of more than 3 degrees Celsius (WPC 2010).

Given that climate change threatens the ecosystem and the future of our world, Kohei Saito (2024) calls for a need for an ecological revolution for planetary survival. He states that the 1.5 C<sup>0</sup> limitation goal, which is considered to be indispensable to stop or at least mitigate the ecological breakdown, requires a 50 % reduction of emissions by 2030 and zero net emissions by 2050 (ibid). Similarly, Kallis (2018, p. 100) argues that climate change threatens not only other species and biodiversity but also the very conditions of living for humans.

Klitgaard (2023) claims that we face an existential threat: "a global habitability crisis engendered by capitalism." According to him, we have already exceeded many of nature's limits to provide resources and assimilate wastes, and we do not have much time to solve the problem:

If we are to limit the average increase in global average temperature above pre-industrial levels to below 2°C, emissions must decline by 73 percent by 2050. Kevin Anderson and Alice Bows assert that a 2°C increase is not the threshold between safe and dangerous, but between dangerous and very dangerous. If we are to keep warming below the 1.5°C threshold agreed upon in Paris, greenhouse gas emissions need to fall by 99 percent by 2050. Cuts in emissions need to be deep, rapid, sustained, and immediate (Klitgaard 2023).

Moreover, the issue of climate change has revealed different states of mind among people. For instance, according to a study performed in ten countries of the Global North in 2023, approximately 70 % of young people are anxiously worried about

climate change. They have feelings like anxiety, fear, anger, and sorrow, and they restrain themselves in daily life due to these sensations. This anxiety is about the consequences of climate change that will highly affect their future, and the anger is because of the lack of precautions. While hoping for a better future, these young people have feelings such as depression because of the despair of what to do, sorrow for the fate of human beings and nature that is destroyed, guilt because you do not always do the right thing, and proud of what you do for climate protection (Quarks 2023).

Einstein once stated that the formulation of a problem is often more essential than its solution. I argue in the same manner that, in the case of such a serious global problem, the initial step should be to understand the underlying causes and then put forward relevant suggestions for solutions. I will not get into details of scientific argumentation, but with general acceptance, science puts forward that the global climate change that we face today is anthropogenic. In other words, it is the direct human effect: the consequences of people's activities and interventions in nature that have caused climate change. However, is it fair to blame an abstract humanity as a whole for the current environmental crimes and the perpetually worsening situation? Or, if it is the case, can we say that every individual human being suffers from the problem at the same level? In this regard, can it be assumed that environmental problems have arisen because humanity did not fulfill its duties to nature or intervened excessively in the natural environment in need of human beings' material interests? I think this argumentation provides a basis for the critique of the liberal approaches and the corresponding impasse in the ecological discourse, which I will try to discuss in the following sections of this chapter.

### **3.2. Who/What is to Blame for the Environmental Degradation?**

Regarding climate change, it would be a mistake to hold the environmental debate without considering accountability. In other words, it would be deficient to tell the story of climate change, ignoring the villains. Actually, the issue is not just about fossil fuels. It is the fossil fuel industry, the corporations, financial organizations, and governments as a whole that are complicit in environmental crimes. The culprit is

capitalism, which rules our world. Concerning the seriousness of climate change, Serres indicates his doubt and concern about a long-term projection of Western capitalism to sustain the well-being of future generations:

Air raid warning! Not a danger coming in from space, but the risk run on earth by the atmosphere: by the weather or climate understood as global systems and as general conditions of survival. For the first time, could the West, which hates children since it produces so few and does not want to pay for the education of those remaining, be starting to think about its descendants' breathing? (Serres 1992, p. 6).

Löwy (2023) asserts that holding human actions responsible for the current ecological situation would be crippled because human beings have lived on Earth for thousands of years, but the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere started accumulating only after the Industrial Revolution. According to Löwy, the culprit is the capitalist system with its absurd and irrational logic of infinite expansion and accumulation, productivism, and “the obsession with the search for profit at any price” (ibid). Aksu (2023) argues in the same manner that ecological problems have not been present since eternity; they came into the scene at a particular era of the historical development of the production system of humans. In this regard, for Aksu (ibid), neither can all actions of humans on nature be considered violent, nor can all humans be blamed for the current ecological destruction.

Similarly, Jason Moore, a Marxist scholar in political ecology, argues that contrary to the general narrative about the Anthropocene, this crisis is not being caused by human beings, but by a particular economic system: a system that depends on perpetual expansion, to the benefit of a small minority of the ruling class. In this regard, Moore introduces the term ‘capitalocene’ instead of Anthropocene (Moore 2022, p. 1). Moore (2023) argues that with the rise of capitalism, nature is something that the bourgeoisie does not want to pay for. In this sense, he uses again a new term, ‘cheap nature’, to draw attention to capitalism’s plundering of nature to increase profits. According to him, the capitalist class has no hesitation in exploiting nature to increase their profits.

In the field of environmentalism, it is widely stated that humans have overstepped their bounds and caused today's catastrophic situation. This individualistic view is

imposed by the liberal approaches in the field. Huber argues that this view instills a sense of inner guilt in individuals, blaming them for the harm inflicted on nature (2022, p. 104). On one hand, I believe that some people or groups are complicit in environmental crimes through their conscious and deliberate actions that destroy nature. On the other hand, I maintain that the assertion of complicity theories in environmental issues serves to burden all humans with guilt, which is unjust. In my opinion, these policies aim to obscure the role of the hegemonic economic system in environmental degradation. Furthermore, these efforts seek to generate consent from people for the dominant system of continuous exploitation of labor and nature. Huber rigorously criticizes this approach for unfairly shifting responsibility.

When confronted with the question of responsibility—the question of who cooked the planet—usually, the answer points to ‘all of us.’ The story of climate responsibility we hear is one of the millions of diffuse individual choices—millions of carbon footprints—adding up to a planetary impact. What is wrong with this story? (Huber 2022, p. 7).

I think that when enormous worldwide problems like climate change, air and water pollution, and the disappearance of species are concerned, such problems cannot be addressed by attending to moral responsibilities to individuals. In other words, the intensity of these global threats is beyond the changes in personal behavior, lifestyle, or individual choices. Jensen (2018) criticizes this appeal to individualistic solutions in the same manner, when the whole world is under such a global threat. In this regard, he questions whether it would be rational, for instance, to suggest individualistic actions to fight against slavery or world wars:

Would any sane human being have thought that picking up discarded useful items would have stopped Hitler, or that composting would have ended slavery, or won the right to work for eight hours, or that chopping wood and carrying water would have freed people from the prisons of Tsarist Russia, or that dancing naked around a fire would have brought about the Voting Rights Act of 1957 or the Civil Rights Act of 1964? So why are so many people turning to such purely ‘personal solutions’ now, when the whole world is under threat? (Jensen 2018).

As stated above, since not all humans are complicit in the ecological crisis and because the current environmental destruction is linked to the logic of the capitalist mode of production, the role of capitalism in this crisis should be clearly articulated.

However, liberal perspectives tend to obscure the role of the capitalist system in the ecological problems we face today. These proponents primarily offer individualistic solutions or precautions based on self-limitation and lifestyle changes.

### **3.3. The Role of Capitalism in Environmental Crimes**

In the field of political ecology, it is almost impossible to overlook the role of capitalism, a system based on the continuous exploitation of both nature and human labor for the sake of profit. The solid results of the capitalist exploitation of nature can be noticed clearly in the ecological crisis. Overproduction is inherent in the capitalist economy, and it highly erodes natural resources, accelerating the destruction of nature. In this context, I argue that the explanation of environmental degradation fundamentally has an economic character: the capitalist mode of production.

Özbudun and Demirer mention that when the culprits are unclear, it is also indeterminate against what/whom to struggle with. In this regard, they draw attention to the level of environmental destruction that we have reached today and directly relate climate change to capitalism's plundering of nature:

Let us not forget: The primordial accumulation of capital is also based on the cruel plunder of nature, as Karl Marx revealed in 'Capital'. Therefore, from the moment it appeared on the stage of history, capitalism knew no limits in plundering and exploiting nature. However, the destruction during the periods of capitalism's rise and development was never felt and seen at the current level. <...> There is a direct relationship between global climate change manifesting itself with much more destructive consequences and capitalism entering a historical crisis. At the current stage, we now face an ecological crisis (Özbudun and Demirer 2024).

Similarly, Jason Moore mentions that capitalism, with its destruction of nature, poses a risk to the existence of the world:

<...> For example, while the lies of "globalization" and "the end of history" run aground and are out of circulation, the parasitic and decaying unsustainable capitalism is dragging human beings and nature, the greatest productive force, to destruction on a global scale. These are signs that the capitalist mode of production has reached a point of historical exhaustion that threatens the development of the productive forces and the world's very existence (Moore 2023).

Under the capitalist mode of production, production inputs and outputs are mainly privately owned; goods and services are priced and purchased in the market. Production is carried out for exchange and circulation in the market, aiming to obtain a net profit from it. The owners of the means of production, the bourgeoisie, derive their profits from the exploitation of the surplus value. The capitalist mode of production depends on producing commodities and is heavily based on exchange-value instead of use-value. In this regard, Marx defines the general formula of the capitalist circulation as M-C-M (money-commodity-money), in which money is transformed into commodities and the commodities change back into money (Marx 1887, p. 104). Marx states that the leading motive and the goal of this M-C-M circuit is exchange-value (ibid., p. 106). He explains the aim of this circuit as follows: “The result, in which the phases of the process vanish, is the exchange of money for money” (ibid., p. 104).

In capitalism, production is controlled overwhelmingly by capital, composed of large corporations and major financial bankrolling organizations. They decide what to produce and the amount of production according to their profit, depending on market relations. Many degrowth thinkers and Marxists dealing with ecology focus on this mechanism of capitalism when working on ecological issues. Hickel (2022), for instance, articulates that in capitalism, the inevitable interaction of humans with nature does not follow the needs of people but rather the needs of capital. Similarly, Hickel (2023b) explains the logic behind the capitalist mode of production stating that capital determines the way and conditions of production in favor of their interests: “For capital, the primary purpose of production is not to meet specific human needs or to achieve social progress, much less to reach any concrete ecological goals. Rather, the overriding objective is to maximize and accumulate profit.” According to Saito (2024), capitalism is characterized by perpetual scarcity due to its drive for unlimited capital accumulation, and “the greed of capital can never be saturated.” Similarly, Başkaya (2023) says that it would be absurd to expect capitalism to take into consideration the limits of nature and to respect nature, humans, and all other living beings. In this regard, Marx himself takes the quote of T.J. Dunning in his famous work, *Capital*, aiming to express how far capitalists can go for the sake of profit:

<...> With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 percent will ensure its employment anywhere; a certain 20 percent will produce eagerness; 50 percent positive audacity; 100 percent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 percent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged (Marx 1887, p. 538).

Capitalism's exploitation of labor and plundering of nature are not separate issues; both are related to the mode of production, which is dependent on producing commodities and appropriating the surplus value. According to Özbudun and Demirer (2024), for capitalism, the only value of humans, animals, and nature is that they create exchange value in the market. The accumulations resulting from the exploitation of these entities enable capitalism to exist by constantly renewing itself (ibid). Similarly, Engels mentions that capitalists engage only in production and exchange for the sake of immediate profit. Only the nearest, most immediate results on production are taken into account; they do not care about the long-term/remote consequences of their actions on nature or society:

<...> What did the Spanish planters in Cuba, who burned down forests on the slopes of the mountains and obtained from the ashes sufficient fertilizer for one generation of very highly profitable coffee trees, care that the tropical rainfall afterward washed away the now unprotected upper stratum of the soil, leaving behind only bare rock? (Engels 1886, p. 90).

Marx, in his work *Grundrisse*, as summarized by Aksu (2023), points out that within the formation of the capitalist mode of production, nature was considered solely as an object, a means of production for the sake of profit and capital accumulation. Aksu (ibid) states that the plundering of nature in a wide sense has started with the evolution of industrial capitalism. Hence, in capitalism, nature is no longer considered an inherent/intrinsic power. The aim of economic growth for the sake of profit leads to control and exploitation of land, seeing nature as a free resource. In this sense, Huber similarly points to the expropriation and the risk of survival under capitalism:

<...> While Marx referred to the capitalist class that expropriated the means of production from the working class, capitalists today have expropriated our means of survival and our planetary future; they have expropriated our atmosphere and turned it into their private dumping ground (Huber 2022, p. 6).

The awareness of capitalism's role in environmental degradation grows these days among environmental actors and the public. In this sense, it can be argued that the discourse in the environmental movements has changed to some extent, holding capitalism responsible for environmental crimes. I believe that the validity of the well-known expression by Rosa Luxemburg at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "either socialism or barbarism," can be better comprehended in context with the environmental degradation we face today. Capital inherently tends to commoditize everything in its mode of production, including natural resources, even at the risk of planetary annihilation. In this regard, Demirer (2021), quotes Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who puts forth the threat under the sovereignty of capital: "As long as capital remains in power, not only land, not only human labor, not only human personality, not only conscience, not only love, not only science, everything will inevitably be bought and sold."

### **3.4. Climate Activism: Demands, Weaknesses, and Strengths**

As environmental awareness and the corresponding discourse develop, climate activism is growing worldwide as well, especially in the Global North. These new climate movements, with their objections to the environmental policies of the governments, might be considered an awakening/renaissance, especially for the young people of the Global North. Through their actions, activists mostly aim to force Western governments to take action against climate change, such as phasing out fossil fuels, employing climate regulations, and implementing international ecological agreements. In this sense, popular international climate organizations such as *Fridays For Future*, *Extinction Rebellion*, *Just Stop Oil*, and *Letzte Generation* are worth noticing. These strong environmental movements perform non-violent civil disobedience actions, aiming to draw attention to the threat posed by global climate change. In my opinion, these climate activist organizations have an extensive common ground with the idea of degrowth, which will be explored profoundly in the following chapter. In other words, the maxim and the practices of these organizations very much evoke the arguments of degrowth. For instance, they have a post-capitalist world imagination like degrowth, in tune with ecological well-being and sustainability. Besides, they argue for a downscaling in material and energy usage

with limited consumption. Therefore, these movements are worth analyzing in this conceptual study of degrowth. In this regard, DeMaria et al. (2013) argue that degrowth actors often engage in different forms of civil disobedience or opposition activism, such as campaigns against fossil fuels, expansion of infrastructures, or huge amounts of extractivist projects.

Feeling the global risk due to the ecological crisis, environmental activists are trying to create new climate-struggle methods to draw the attention of the masses and convince them to join their struggle. Their struggle is getting more radical with various actions like climate strikes, blockage of main roads, occupation of rural areas, huge demonstrations, and hunger strikes. As a response to this activism, European governments are suppressing climate activists harshly at the same time, and the members of these organizations are under great pressure. It is hypocrisy; Western governments are on the one hand supposedly trying to overcome environmental degradation, imposing green policies, and leading the climate discourse globally; on the other hand, they are suppressing some robust climate organizations/activists in their own countries. So, what has changed in the environmental debate? I argue that no sooner than some environmental organizations bluntly blamed capitalism and monopolies for environmental degradation, they had become a target for Western governments, with the accusation of being criminal organizations. For example, members of *the Letzte Generation* were called climate terrorists by German authorities. As a result, the houses of the members were raided, some members were arrested, and the website of the organization was blocked by authorities. A similar treatment was performed on the members of *Just Stop Oil* in England when they tried to protest oil companies at Heathrow Airport in London. Even very old activists were arrested and imprisoned due to their blockades at the airport.

I find these environmental movements and their struggles significant and admirable, and I disassociate them from the liberal views that I criticize. I believe that they have made a great contribution to the environmental struggle via various creative opposition instruments. Furthermore, these movements are worthy in the sense that they point to capitalism as accountable for the ecological breakdown and do not try

to place the responsibility on all human beings. Besides, they call for a collective climate struggle against capitalism to save our planetary future. In this sense, I consider these popular movements more progressive than the liberal approaches in the field. However, I think we should ponder why these struggles do not attract the attention of the greater masses and why climate justice politics lack public support. Despite the determination and commitment of the activists in the field under all such oppression and threats from the governments, despite their various alternative struggles, what is missing in modern-day environmentalism? In this regard, Huber highlights the relevance of today's ecological problems to the basic needs of the poor, who suffer more from environmental problems like air and water pollution and water scarcity. Nevertheless, according to him, the arguments of the climate movement do not meet the basic needs and primary interests of these poor people. Huber challenges the current environmentalism in the sense that they do not offer an adequate strategy to win over the masses:

<...> But the vast majority of people in a neoliberal gilded age have been dealing with austerity and trying to do more with less for decades. They are seeing wage stagnation, debt, and austerity, and to approach any environmental politics where your main message is reduction, it is just not a strategy that will win over people necessarily (Huber 2022, p. 102).

I believe that Huber is right at this point; when we look into the current environmental struggles, it can be argued that ecological awareness and the corresponding social movements mainly rely on urban middle classes, including intellectuals, academics, and white collar workers. Hence, they do not embrace the agenda of the masses, especially the ones who are deprived of basic material needs. In other words, these environmental movements are out of touch with the everyday material needs and interests of the masses of the working class since they are focusing on reductionist policies. As a result, they are very far from persuading millions of laborers and achieving a united climate struggle of the masses to stop environmental degradation. So, although these remarkable environmental organizations that I have stated above have an anti-capitalist world imagination and despite their contribution to ecological awareness, I argue that they are also a part of the impasse in today's environmentalism. They cannot go beyond the attention of a limited group of people, who can be classified as the members of the petite bourgeoisie.

Furthermore, I think the liberal approaches are still dominant in the field of environmentalism, trying to conceal the crimes of capitalism against nature. In this regard, corporations, governments, and their agents, such as the media, education, and a segment of the scientific community, have been leading us to discuss climate change issues without questioning the underlying cause. I argue that they are deliberately misleading the masses and have a deceptive role concerning the causes and solutions to environmental problems. Therefore, I believe these liberal perspectives weaken environmental activism, and in this sense, they are also guilty of the impending catastrophic ecological situation. I will try to discuss these liberal approaches to environmentalism in the next section in detail and raise my objections to their arguments.

### **3.5. An Objection to Liberal Approaches in Environmentalism**

I argue that in the field of environmentalism, the individualist approach with the claim that everyone is complicit in environmental crimes and everyone shares the responsibility for environmental degradation is misleading. This consideration emerges from the individualistic perspective of liberal minds; i.e., liberal approaches try to reduce environmental problems through a personalized consumption analysis. It is a fact that overconsumption increases the damage given to natural resources; however, sticking to an analysis of consumption as a driver of climate change is a misrepresentation of the problem. It is a common approach in liberal environmentalism to burden the responsibility of ecological destruction on individuals and focus on individual consumption and carbon footprint analysis.

As Huber indicates in his different works, “an inward-looking guilt” that blames one’s own consumption for causing the ecological crisis should be criticized for deliberately misleading people. Besides, focusing solely on individual carbon footprint analysis is defective because it does not consider political or social interactions. Concerning ecological problems, liberal politicians and their agents mainly suggest individual precautions or remedies within the hegemonic system, such as not using deodorants, recycling our waste, consuming less, turning off the tap while brushing our teeth, or taking shorter showers to fight against the climate crisis.

Governments impose such public awareness campaigns as well. Nevertheless, this way of thinking does not work since they are far from discussing the underlying causes. For sure, these initiatives do not imagine and posit a model beyond capitalism. Moreover, the dominant liberal approaches in environmentalism attach so much importance to institutional solutions, like the Paris Climate Convention, for the ecological sustainability of the system. They demand the approval and implementation of such climate agreements by the governments as a solution to environmental problems. With their focus on improving the legislation system and their call to international institutions to take a step, I believe these movements are missing the point. I consider the so-called 'international community' and its institutions problematic because the ones that are part of the problem cannot offer a solution to that problem. Therefore, I think it is a conscious distortion of the liberal ecologists' views when they are demanding solutions from international institutions to slow down climate change. Similarly, in the People's Agreement of Cochabamba, it is strongly criticized that the real cause of climate change is intentionally disassembled by these institutions:

<...> The corporations and governments of the so-called 'developed' countries, in complicity with a segment of the scientific community, have led us to discuss climate change as a problem limited to the rise in temperature without questioning the cause, which is the capitalist system (WPC 2010).

Eduardo Galeano (2009), as stated in the work of Demirer, criticizes the professionals of the environment for concealing the facts as well:

Environmental technocrats are multiplying like rabbits. Experts are trying to tightly package the uncertainty of the issue by producing new experts. <...> The official language tries to smother up the truth to excuse those who impose models in the name of progress on the consumer society and those who destroy the world (Demirer 2012, p. 19).

In the climate debate, it can be argued that rich countries always have the opportunity to dominate climate issues. These countries, which produce higher amounts of emissions, have a strong influence on the international system and have the power to lead the decisions of the institutions as well. Demirer (2012, p. 16) points to the 2012 Report of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), stating that if the people of the

world lived like an average American, we would need four times the current resources of the world to meet the demands. However, the need would be only two-thirds of the resources if we lived like Indonesians. Apropos, not all humans are responsible for ecological problems, and the level of contribution of people to environmental harm differs severely. As an example, an Oxfam Report in 2022 indicates that the 125 richest billionaires, on average, were responsible for a million times the carbon emissions of the average person in the bottom 90 percent of income globally (Oxfam International 2023). Again, the liberal viewpoints do not have any words for these worldwide genuine distinctions.

These liberal minds in modern-day environmentalism are far from offering a realistic solution to the climate crisis due to their wrong-headed policies. With their consideration of a uniform/homogeneous humanity responsible for the environmental problems and with their ignorance of the economic, social, geographic distinctions and power relations, I consider them guilty of distorting the ecological facts. I contend that we should explicitly show the responsibility and the culpability of the capitalist mode of production in environmental crimes to put forth adequate solutions. Hence, we need a different perspective while dealing with environmental problems. For instance, Fikret Başkaya, in one of his interviews (Yurdanur 2023), mentions that for the ecological struggle to be worthy of its name, it must have the perspective of radically overcoming capitalism. Otherwise, what is done is nothing more than a distraction for the audience. He argues that environmental struggles or efforts to protect nature cannot be achieved just by saying, “Let’s protect the forests.” Instead, the initial step should be asking the question of who is destroying the forests and why (ibid).

In the coming Chapters 4 and 5 of my study, my effort will focus on a detailed analysis of ‘degrowth’ as a newborn idea/stance in the sphere of environmentalism. The idea of degrowth is introduced as a solution to today’s ecological crisis, threatening life on the planet. After an extensive scrutiny of degrowth, with its positive and negative aspects given, I aim to discuss whether degrowth can be an adequate solution to the ecological breakdown. Finally, I will propose class struggle as a key to this deadlock of environmental activism, similar to Matthew Huber: “The

climate fight is not a cultural struggle against those who consume the most carbon but a class struggle against those who actually produce fossil fuels” (Van Horn & Turner 2022).

Let us give an ear to Albert Einstein as the last word of this chapter:

<...> I am convinced there is only one way to eliminate these grave evils, namely through the establishment of a socialist economy, accompanied by an educational system that would be oriented toward social goals. In such an economy, the means of production are owned by society itself and are utilized in a planned fashion. A planned economy, which adjusts production to the needs of the community, would distribute the work to be done among all those able to work and would guarantee a livelihood to every man, woman, and child (Einstein, 2009, p. 61).

## CHAPTER 4

### WHAT IS DEGROWTH?

#### 4.1. A Comprehensive Definition and the Historical Development of Degrowth

“Either we find a way to stop those who are plundering the Earth and share the limited planet that we have, or we will enter a new Dark Age of humanity.”<sup>9</sup>

Considering the serious environmental problems threatening life on the planet, Giorgos Kallis, one of the pioneers of degrowth literature, suggests degrowth as a solution to the deepening ecological breakdown in the opening words of his book.

Over a decade, the term ‘degrowth’ has gained popularity and brought together many agents in environmentalism, including environmental movements and activists, academics, and civil society. However, what is degrowth, and what does it stand for? In this chapter, I will try to set forth some definitions together with a concise history of this newly emerging idea/stance in the field of environmentalism, appealing to various researchers and academics.

Before starting a conceptual analysis of degrowth, I think it would be appropriate to work briefly on the term's denotation and connotation. For instance, can degrowth be designated as a theory? Is it just an idea, opinion, or a stance/position in the field of environmentalism? Or is it a mixture of theory, metaphor, and stance? Put differently, is degrowth a solid theory of environmentalism, or is it just a utopia? Kallis argues that degrowth is not only a hypothesis but rather is used as a vision of an alternative world: “Degrowth can therefore be thought of as a new imagination: a

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<sup>9</sup> Kallis, *What is Degrowth?* 2018.

new set of ideas and fantasies that will institute and effect the change of the material world” (Kallis 2018, p. 118).

While analyzing degrowth and presenting its definition and historical development, degrowth seems to be easily named as a theory. Since it is not in the scope of this study, I will not dive into the argumentation of the term ‘theory’ in the sciences. However, is this denotation of degrowth (a theory) correct? In philosophy, it is not so clear what a theory is as it is plainly explained in natural sciences. For instance, there are no definite case studies or openly testable propositions, bringing together various hypotheses to articulate a theory. Instead, we can use the term ‘theory’ for systematic, comprehensive efforts to analyze and/or solve a problem. Likewise, in social sciences, a theory can mostly be considered a perspective or an explanation, or a position to discuss different aspects of a problem. In this regard, degrowth has a factual part on the one hand; it is mainly proposed as an objection to the growth imperative, which is a testable material issue addressing economic indicators. On the other hand, it is an idea challenging the “social imaginary on issues like development, democracy, and the good life” (DeMaria et al. 2013, p. 208). Nevertheless, concerning the systematic critique of growth and the effort to analyze and solve the ecological crisis, degrowth can more or less be considered a theory in environmentalism.

Still, to avoid confusion, I would prefer to designate the term ‘degrowth’ as an idea or a stance, as used in my thesis title, rather than a theory in the sphere of environmentalism. A wide range of articulations/arguments can be designated as ideas; in other words, the term ‘idea’ has a more general meaning. Besides, since degrowth has a political and ethical standpoint in the field of environmentalism, the term ‘stance’ might also be appropriate. Finally, considering the ease and convenience, I will often use the term in the form of “the idea of degrowth” or just “degrowth” throughout my work.

Research and Degrowth, an international think-tank organization working on the concept and events around degrowth, defines degrowth as follows:

Sustainable degrowth is a downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions and equity on the planet. It calls for a future where societies live within their ecological means, with open, localized economies and resources more equally distributed through new forms of democratic institutions (Research & Degrowth 2024).

Miller-McDonald (2021) asserts that given the degrowth community and literature are so young, there are substantial discussions regarding the meaning of the term. Today, academics and social movements are paying increasing attention to the idea, and the notion of degrowth raises several significant questions (ibid). In this sense, while defining degrowth, Hickel (2021) refers to Angela Davis, who stated, "One of the greatest challenges of any social movement is to develop new vocabularies." As the degrowth literature is heterogeneous and content-rich, it is not easy to clarify the term at first. For instance, according to Demaria et al. (2013, p. 210), the idea of degrowth "combines different streams of thought and formulates different strategies rather than articulating a single guide." This complexity and multi-dimensionality of degrowth can sometimes lead to ambiguities and misunderstandings on different occasions as well.

Akbulut (2021, p. 98) says, since its first use, "the term 'degrowth'—or, in its French original, *décroissance*, as used initially by Andre Gorz in 1972—has become a forceful conceptual framework for imagining alternative ways of articulating society, economy, and nature." From that time on, the concept of degrowth has entered not only into academic literature but also into the arguments of social movements with great interest (ibid). Kallis explains degrowth as the reduction of energy and resource throughput, aligning with environmental sustainability. He states that "in economic terms, degrowth refers to a trajectory where the throughput (energy, materials, and waste flows) of an economy decreases while welfare or well-being improves" (Kallis 2018, p. 9). In a follow-up study, Kallis argues that broader definitions of degrowth encompass it as a social movement, emphasizing policy strategies such as eco-villages, community currencies, and basic income to provide an alternative economic system (Kallis, 2019). Likewise, Schmelzer et al. (2022, p. 4) define degrowth as a democratic transition to a society that relies on a smaller throughput of energy and resources. They assert that this model will deepen democracy and ensure a good life and social justice for the masses while rejecting continuous expansion (ibid). One of

the prominent proponents of ecosocialism, John Bellamy Foster, states that the concept of degrowth represents a variety of political and economic viewpoints that reject unbounded economic growth as an indicator of human progress in today's ecological crisis (Foster 2023a, p. 90).

The rejection of perpetual economic growth is the main issue that underlies the idea of degrowth. For instance, according to Kallis (2018, p. 1), degrowth marks “a ruthless critique of the dogma of more”—that is, the dogma of economic growth and its ecological consequences. However, it can be seen from the assertions that the term degrowth differs from the antonym of growth. In other words, degrowth cannot be merely expressed as a theory of anti-growth or non-growth; instead, it goes beyond these connotations. Kallis strongly emphasizes that degrowth is not negative growth, and the goal of degrowth is not to make GDP<sup>10</sup> growth negative (Kallis 2018, p. 9). Demaria et al. (2013, p. 208) quote Latouche (2009), who says, “Degrowth is not a concrete and universal alternative to growth but a matrix of multiple options that will reopen the space for human creativity.” Similarly, Işıkara (2023) puts forward that, though degrowth may initially appear as negative GDP growth that respects ecological constraints, it involves a social imaginary beyond this. Işıkara (2020, p. 115) articulates that this contraction in energy and material use inevitably involves a contraction in GDP; however, economic degrowth (negative GDP growth rates) is not the goal of degrowth as a political program but its expected outcome. Nelson (2024) states that the major philosophical criticism in the degrowth idea is its questioning of “anti-social, market-based practices focused on competition and growth.” In addition, this critique of the growth imperative in the market highlights the domination of monetary powers in capitalism and the alienation of the individual (ibid). Likewise, for Akbulut, although degrowth is most directly understood as material downscaling, it signifies a much broader transformation: a break from the ideology of growth, “the repoliticization of the economy, and a reorientation of economic relations based on different principles” (Akbulut 2021, p. 98).

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<sup>10</sup> GDP is defined in Wikipedia as follows: “Gross Domestic Product, GDP, is a monetary measure of the market value of all the goods and services produced and rendered in a specific time period by a country or countries. GDP is often used to measure the economic health of a country or region.”

As defined in these sources above, it can be argued that degrowth, as a political and ethical stance, concerns not only economic issues of a material scale-down but also has a strong emphasis on societal formation. In this regard, Işıkara indicates that by criticizing productivism and the pursuit of endless growth, the degrowth movement argues that the current way of life should be reversed, and society should be freed from the pursuit of growth and achieve vitality through downsizing (Işıkara 2020, p. 111). In this sense, Kallis points to the role of economic growth in environmental damage and posits the importance of a new perspective:

Degrowth is, first, a critique of the ecological consequences of economic growth. The faster we produce and consume goods, the more we transform and damage the environment. We should extract, produce, and consume less and do it all differently. To prosper without growth, we must establish a radically different economic system and way of living (Kallis 2018, p. 1).

Again, the strong emphasis on a different way of organizing society is marked here. Simply put, degrowth offers a way out of the dominant economic model of the ruling system, which is based on continuous growth. The exit from this system, namely capitalism, requires forming a different societal model to maintain ecological sustainability. Degrowth proponents believe that social welfare and prosperity can increase even under these reduced energy and material transition conditions in this differently organized society.

Emphasizing the multidimensionality of the idea, Demaria et al. (2013, p. 193) state that degrowth is not just an economic concept but also “a frame constituted by a large array of concerns, goals, strategies, and actions.” Establishing a political stance, Hickel (2021) defends degrowth as having an anti-colonialist aspect as well, in the sense that degrowth calls for wealthy nations to scale down throughput to sustainable levels, reducing aggregate energy and resource use to reverse ecological breakdown. According to Hickel, this demand is not just about ecology but also a demand for decolonization (ibid). In this regard, it can be argued that degrowth is not only about a quantitative change in economic scales; it also has a social and political character at a global scale, demanding equality, social justice, and improved life quality for the masses. The degrowth idea suggests a transition to a democratic post-capitalist economy, where production is organized around well-being for all (ibid). However, I

doubt that degrowth thinkers propose plausible and solid solutions to mitigate ecological breakdown and to maintain social and ecological well-being when they are arguing for a new societal model. This is one of the crucial points that I want to discuss in the following chapters of this study.

After presenting various definitions of the idea of degrowth, I think it will be valuable to analyze its historical progress. As mentioned before, the term degrowth was first used by André Gorz in 1972 in its original French, *décroissance*. Research and Degrowth (2024) says that “*décroissance* was launched as a missile word by academicians and social movements in the 2000s to spur a re-radicalization of environmentalism.” In this sense, *décroissance* became an activist slogan in France in 2001, “*Decrescita*” in the same meaning in Italy in 2004, and “*Decreixementa/Decrecimiento*” in Catalonia in 2006 (Research & Degrowth 2024). However, the meaning and the context of the term have substantially changed since then. For an in-depth analysis of degrowth’s roots and its historical development, it would be better to refer to Kallis’s and Işıkara’s studies.

Kallis (2018, p. 2) indicates that the initial and probably the deepest root of degrowth depends on the works of Rachel Carson and Donella Meadows in the 1960s and 1970s. Kallis (ibid) refers to Meadows’ book, *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972), which showed how exponential growth will inevitably collapse because it will eventually deplete the raw materials that fuel it and pollute the environment that it depends upon. Kallis (ibid) states that, according to Carson and Meadows, the aim of unlimited economic growth and nature’s integrity and stability cannot go together. At this point, Işıkara draws attention to the importance of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen’s studies, defining it as “the second phase of the development of the idea of degrowth” (Işıkara 2020; 2023; 2024). Georgescu-Roegen, a Romanian mathematician and economist, underlined that the second law of thermodynamics<sup>11</sup> also applies to economic processes. In this regard, Georgescu-Roegen laid the groundwork for the

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<sup>11</sup> According to the definition in Wikipedia, the second law of thermodynamics—known as the law of entropy—“is a physical law based on universal empirical observation concerning heat and energy interconversions. A simple statement of the law is that heat always flows spontaneously from hotter to colder regions of matter.” “The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that the state of entropy of the entire universe, as an isolated system, will always increase over time. The second law also states that the changes in the entropy in the universe can never be negative” (Libretexts Chemistry).

thesis that unlimited growth is impossible (Işıkara 2020, p. 108). Though applying this physical law to various non-isolated systems leads to a scientific debate, this argument still stands for one of the fundamental theses of degrowth proponents in the bio-economic sense. Similarly, Smith and Smith (1996, p. 309) assert that the second law of thermodynamics has played an important role in ecological economics, justifying the view that economies have limits to growth. They quote from the 20th-century physicist Arthur Eddington (1928), who asserted the metaphysical justification of the second law of thermodynamics as follows:

The law that entropy always increases, the second law of thermodynamics, holds, I think, the supreme position among the laws of Nature. <...> But if your theory is found to be against the second law of thermodynamics, I can give you no hope; there is nothing for it but to collapse in deepest humiliation (Smith and Smith 1996, p. 309).

Likewise, Kallis points out that Georgescu-Roegen had put forth a thermodynamic rethinking of economics, that the economic process transforms—inevitably and irreversibly—low-entropy (high-order) resources into high-entropy (low-order) ones. This transformation will inevitably lead to ecological breakdown in a limited world<sup>12</sup>. Kallis (2018, p. 3) again quotes Georgescu-Roegen (1975), who states that “given that mineral stocks and fossil fuels are exhaustible, human activity will, in the long run, have to decrease to a scale supported by the flow rate of solar energy.” At this point, Kallis refers to the work of Herman Daly (1991)—a disciple of Georgescu-Roegen—who argued that in the long term, only a stationary (steady) state of economic activity is sustainable; therefore, the economy must have a constant throughput of energy and materials (ibid). In his same work, Kallis (2018, p. 4) mentions that after Daly and Georgescu-Roegen, ecological economists also criticized growth, but they did not go so far as advocating degrowth. For instance, Gorz, who coined the original French word for degrowth, wondered whether capitalism was compatible with degrowth in material production necessary to restore the earth’s balance (ibid). Gorz (1977), as summarized by Kallis (2018, p. 4), argues

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<sup>12</sup> It must be mentioned that living beings (organisms) on Earth have the capacity of producing negative entropy (high-order). Although they can reduce high entropies (low-order) formed in economic processes to some extent, their capacity is not enough to compensate today’s abnormal increases. Still, the breakdown occurred by this threat can take more time in our World, thanks to the existence and the regulating role of the Sun.

in the same sense that perpetual growth is physically impossible and ecological realism demands that we consume less. Moreover, in this historical progress of degrowth, Kallis remarks on the significant role of Serge Latouche, claiming that Latouche brought together the ecological economics of Georgescu-Roegen, the political ecology of Gorz and Illich, and the concerns of post-development (Kallis 2018, p. 6). He mentions that Latouche had posited the critique of limits to growth with the postcolonial critique of development and called for an exit from the economy in the name of autonomy and democracy (ibid).

Based on the historical development explained above, the international degrowth community has expanded enormously during the past decade. Starting from the First Degrowth Conference held in Paris in 2008, international conferences on degrowth have taken place every two years, hosting many activists and academics worldwide. Research and Degrowth (2024) states that the English term degrowth first appeared at this first conference in Paris in 2008, marking the beginning of degrowth as an academic research area and international civil society debate. From then on, new scholars joined, new debates opened, and the accumulated knowledge of more significant movements fertilized the degrowth discourse (Research & Degrowth 2024). As an example, Miller-McDonald (2021) indicates that the degrowth proponent Timothee Parrique counted 203 essays, 70 academic articles, and 11 books on degrowth published only in 2020.

The idea of degrowth developed not only in academia but also became a leading thought in many environmental movements. Kallis, in his study (2018, p. 7), refers to the work of Martinez-Allier (2012), who stated that environmental justice activists from both the Global North and the Global South brought their experience to the idea of degrowth from their struggles against huge extractive or infrastructure projects pursued in the name of growth. Kallis (ibid), again referring to Martinez-Allier et al. (2014), emphasized that the flow of ideas between the activists and academia was multidirectional, learning from each other. Similarly, Demaria et al. (2013, p. 204) defined degrowth as an example of “an activist-led science” that entered the international academic agenda in English around 2008, where an activist slogan is slowly consolidated into a concept that can be analyzed and discussed in the

educational arena. In a recent study, Schmelzer et al. (2022, p. 13) indicated the comprehensiveness of degrowth in the field of environmentalism, expressing that degrowth has brought many struggles together, developed a distinctive view, and politicized the debate in this field.

Up to now, not only has degrowth made significant progress theoretically, but also, the idea has joined together with social and environmental movements in practice. Research and Degrowth (2024) explicates this progress of degrowth, focusing on the relationship between degrowth and environmental movements. Many activists, political stakeholders, trade unions, and researchers have an interaction with the idea of degrowth, and there are environmental movements supporting degrowth (ibid). Indicating the possibility and potentiality of alliances of degrowth in environmentalism, Research and Degrowth asserts that the degrowth movement has already interacted with other movements both in the Global North and the Global South, exchanging views and knowledge (ibid).

#### **4.2. The Relationship between the Growth Imperative and Capitalism: The Manifestation of Degrowth as a Challenge to Growth**

“Even when the earth will be unlimited, we will  
be against growth, because it destroys the human  
in ourselves, because it destroys beauty.”<sup>13</sup>

As explicitly mentioned in the previous section, although it has quite extensive content, the idea of degrowth is primarily suggested and commonly held as a challenge to the growth imperative—generally, what is meant here is economic growth—permeating our current way of living. For instance, Chen (2023) manifests that despite the differences in their visions of a degrowth or a no-growth economy, degrowth proponents all share a common critique of the growth paradigm that mainstream environmental economics takes for granted. Similarly, Akbulut (2023) defines degrowth as a post-development idea with a critique of growth, arguing that degrowth has a social aim of deconstructing the ideology toward economic growth.

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<sup>13</sup> Jean-Claude Decourt. A French scholar in French National Centre for Scientific Research.

The basis of this critique of growth depends on the assumption that in a world of limited resources, it is impossible to maintain unlimited/perpetual growth. I consider this section to be one of the most significant parts of my study because degrowth is mainly a challenge to capitalism's prevailing growth imperative. Thus, it is vital to analyze various aspects of growth to understand degrowth's arguments. In this sense, I believe the degrowth idea has ushered in a new era of critical perspective on growth's economic and social hegemony.

Economic growth is now a widely used, well-known term that can be taken as common knowledge. The definition of economic growth is given in Wikipedia as follows: “Economic growth can be defined as the increase or improvement in the inflation-adjusted market value of the goods and services produced by an economy in a financial year.” Statisticians conventionally measure growth by the percentage rate of increase in nominal gross domestic product (GDP). In this sense, economic growth is often accepted as an indicator of human progress and development. Nevertheless, it can be argued that this definition is formulated in line with the concepts and interests of the global capitalist economy. Therefore, it would not be wrong to assert that what is meant by growth today is generally capitalist growth or capital accumulation. Hence, growth cannot be taken to be the same as human progress or development.

In the field of environmentalism, including the proponents of degrowth, there is a general agreement on the interpretation that the growth imperative is inherent in the capitalist mode of production and that the pursuit of endless growth leads to environmental harm. Empson (2024) expresses that the connection of capitalist economic growth to today's ecological crisis resonates not only among climate activists but is also discussed by a broad range of left-wing and ecological thinkers. According to Empson, the popular environmentalist slogan—“You cannot have endless growth on a finite planet”—shows that many activists see a direct correlation between economic growth and ecological degradation. As a result, the idea of degrowth is considered a counter-program to the growth imperative of capitalism; thus, it is a challenge to capitalism's plundering of nature (ibid).

Growth, as we know it, is capitalist growth based on the capitalist mode of production, which is strongly dependent on continuous exploitation and accumulation of surplus value. In this regard, Löwy (2023) defines capitalism as a system that cannot exist without growth and accumulation of capital, commodities, and profits. Furthermore, working on the historical development of capitalism, Löwy expresses the relationship between capitalist growth and the extended use of fossil fuels as well (ibid). Fossil fuels, generally accepted as the leading cause of global warming and climate change, play a significant role in increasing the productive capacity of the modern capitalist economy to pursue more profit. Today, it is known that environmental damage escalates with an increase in the usage of fossil fuels. Similarly, in his interview, Başkaya draws attention to the need for continuous growth in capitalism, articulating that in a wild, competitive arena, a tremendous amount of surplus is always needed (Yurdanur 2023). Furthermore, Başkaya focuses on the relationship between growth and today's ecological crisis, arguing that if capitalism cannot obtain enough surplus to grow, it focuses more on plundering nature (ibid). Hence, this is a matter of survival for the capitalists: to grow or die.

At this point, Empson (2024) refers to Marx, who asserted that capitalists are compelled to constantly expand production and grow and reinvest the surplus value of the workers back into production as capital to expand production further. This is the main structure of the capitalist economy that Marx characterizes as “the General Formula For Capital”, i.e., the circuit M-C-M (Marx 1887, p. 104), which I mentioned in Chapter 3. Marx states that rather than considering use-value as an end and aim (C-M-C circuit), the circuit M-C-M starts and ends with money (Marx 1887, p. 106). In this circuit, the capitalist produces and sells commodities not to cover our needs or wants but rather to sell and obtain surplus value. “The character and tendency of the process M-C-M is therefore not due to any qualitative difference between its extremes, but solely to their quantitative difference” (ibid). According to Marx, this circulation of capital has no limits, and “boundless greed and passionate chase after exchange-value is common to the capitalist” (ibid., p. 107).

Similarly, according to Işıkara (2023), what is meant by growth in capitalism is actually capital accumulation. The surplus obtained is not used for the social well-

being or needs of the masses, but rather for the reinvestments of capital, such as machinery or technology (ibid). This shows us the difference between use-value (satisfaction of wants) and exchange-value-oriented views. The capitalist does not ever aim at use-values; instead, what he aims at is the continuous profit-making process (Marx 1887, p. 107). In this regard, Andreucci and Engel-Di Mauro (2019, p. 183) refer to Finley, who states that the word ‘growth’ might express an emancipatory potential associated with qualitative development and enrichment when liberated from its capitalist characterization as endless accumulation and commodification. Likewise, Hickel, in his interview with Miller-McDonald (2021), explains the relationship between capitalism and growth as follows:

Under capitalism, innovations that deliver efficiency improvements lead not to a reduction of energy and resource use but rather to more energy and resource use because the gains are reinvested to expand the process of production and consumption. In other words, growthism wipes out our most impressive improvements. When it comes to confronting ecological breakdown, we must realize that it is not our technology that’s the problem; it is growth (Miller-McDonald 2021).

Chen (2023) emphasizes the role of the growth paradigm in serving the purpose of endless accumulation of capital and states that “what is to be challenged is not just any material growth but the growth paradigm of capitalism in general.” Hickel argues in the same manner that growth is the ideology of capitalism; it is the tenet of capitalism’s cultural hegemony:

Recognizing that the word ‘growth’ has become a kind of propaganda term is essential. In reality, what is going on is a process of elite accumulation, the commodification of commons, and the appropriation of human labor and natural resources—a process quite often colonial in character. This process is generally destructive to human communities and ecology and is glossed as growth (Hickel 2020b, p. 1107).

Hickel (2022) defines growth as an ideological term, mentioning that capitalism is organized around perpetual growth at exponential rates, always in pursuit of more profit. For Hickel, capitalism is distinctive from other modes of production in its organization and dependency on perpetual growth (ibid). As stated in the interview with Miller-McDonald (2021), Hickel defines the imperative to increase GDP as a holy sacrament to policymakers and economic pundits. For a capitalist economy to

be stable, continuous growth is essential; if the system does not grow, it breaks down (ibid). Thus, considering the interaction of humans with nature in the production process, continuous growth presupposes a constant increase in the extraction of raw materials and the usage of energy and resources. This process paves the way for the exploitation of both human labor and nature in the capitalist mode of production. In this regard, it can be claimed that capitalist growth has a non-negligible role in environmental degradation.

According to Foster (2023a, p. 91), growth is anything that provides and adds value following the capitalist valorization process. Like other scholars, Foster also puts forward the role of the growth imperative and its non-stop capital accumulation in environmental degradation, mentioning that maximum extraction of natural resources is seen as crucial for rapid economic growth in capitalism (ibid). In this regard, Foster, referring to the work of Marx and Engels (1975), says that this exploitation of nature in capitalism is justified as nature's "free gift to capital" (ibid., p. 91). Furthermore, Foster manifests that behind growth lie colonialism, land appropriation, and the separation of workers from the land. With an explicit critique of capitalism in the current ecological breakdown, Foster (ibid., p. 93) indicates the importance and the necessity of a degrowth/deaccumulation approach since degrowth challenges today's accumulative society and the primacy of economic growth. Similarly, Kallis explicates the relationship between capitalism and growth by stating that growth has always been based on exploitation in the capitalist system, and the institutions of capitalism legitimize themselves through praise of growth (Kallis 2019b, p. 273). He argues that investment and growth in the capitalist system depend on the surplus obtained by exploiting human labor and nature. According to Kallis, to get out of the capitalist imagination of growth, we should start changing the words we use and the images that come with them (Kallis 2018, p. 1).

In this regard, I believe Kallis thinks that the growth phenomenon is inherent in the capitalist mode of production. However, he also argues that although growth can be considered the child of capitalism, the child has now taken over the representation of the family from the parent (Kallis 2018, p. 1). So, for Kallis, growth has become the main actor behind ecological degradation. I suppose this approach ambiguates the

role of capitalism in the environmental destruction that we face today. In other words, Kallis considers growth a phenomenon in itself; growth for its own sake, not growth as an inevitable and compulsory component of capitalism. I contend that this perspective leads to a misinterpretation of the culprit of the exploitation of nature, namely, the capitalist mode of production. I lean toward considering growth as a means, which ensures capital accumulation and the sustainability of the capitalist system. Hence, the problem is not growth on its own, but rather the capitalist mode of production pursuing growth and profits. Likewise, Işıkara thinks that the decoupling of growth from the capitalist mode of production leads to a consideration of growth as a phenomenon in itself rather than an outcome of economic relations (Işıkara 2023).

In my opinion, rather than considering the capitalist mode of production as the major cause of the expropriation of natural resources, which gives rise to environmental degradation, Kallis's arguments here may fetish and target growth per se, decoupling it from the machinery of capitalism. In this sense, I think Kallis—like many other degrowth proponents—has a timid approach and hesitates to target capitalism directly; instead, he focuses on growth itself as the main cause of the environmental problems. Focusing on growth rather than the mode of production, I believe Kallis keeps a distance from socialism as well:

Growth in the material standard of living means growth in using materials (and energy). More resource use means more impacts on people and the environment. Whether the economy that produces such growth is capitalist, pre-capitalist, or socialist makes no difference. What is different is that capitalism is geared to grow or die. Socialism could, at least in principle, secure a better quality of life with fewer resources and energy and distribute them more equally. This is what I broadly call degrowth (Kallis 2019b, p. 267).

In another study, Kallis indicates the role of capital accumulation, rather than growth per se, in the exploitation of nature stating that growth is not the driver, but an outcome of capital accumulation (Kallis 2018, p. 73). As a logical consequence of this statement, Işıkara (2024) says that Kallis should see that it is not appropriate to speak of a general and abstract growth independent of the modes of production. In this regard, what is discussed as growth is capitalist growth, which causes the current ecological crisis. Işıkara argues that, as a phenomenon and as a concept, growth

appeared with the historical development of capitalism, and this growth is determined and oriented by capital's interests (ibid).

Kallis also gives credit to socialism with its qualitative approach to social well-being for the masses, stating that under socialism, growth should not be a goal:

<...> Socialists should not use the word 'growth' to refer to improvements in things like health or education. We are not dealing with quantitative magnitudes. Children might need a more accessible and more holistic polytechnic education. Patients may need more human contact and care from their doctors. Only under capitalist industrial production do such improvements assume a quantitative dimension (number of patients treated, average exam scores, added money value generated by hospitals and schools) (Kallis 2019a, p. 191).

Nevertheless, I believe that Kallis deliberately refrains from the polemics and debate between capitalism and socialism, and as Işıkara (2020, p. 112) states, he prefers not to be a party to this historical cleavage between these two models. I can observe a similar ambiguity in various scholars in degrowth literature when it comes to taking a definite political stance against capitalism. In my opinion, degrowth thinkers do not clearly explain their post-capitalist imagination or articulate an alternative world to capitalism. It can be argued that the academic discourse opts to stay neutral in this politically harsh discussion. However, when it comes to the environmental crisis, which is entirely a political issue, I assert that it cannot be an academic choice to pace around as Kallis does. Indeed, I contend that it is not enough alone to be a side of this political debate. Surely, it is important to have a clear stance at every step; nevertheless, as Marx put forward, the point is not only to interpret the situation but rather to change it. Regarding the arguments of degrowth proponents, I generally see the situation as follows: In case the capitalist mode of production is considered to be the primary cause of the current ecological crisis, it would be necessary to propose an alternative structure that negates capitalism. Concerning the growth imperative of capitalism, though many degrowth thinkers widely oppose capitalism and hold a post-capitalist imagination, they do not openly name an alternative to the capitalist system. This is one of the points to deal with while explicating my critiques of the idea of degrowth.

As I stated before, growth has permeated into our lives, and it is widely acknowledged that economic growth is necessary for the well-being of the masses.

Moreover, growth proponents often make efforts to relate the aim of growth to human nature. In other words, they argue that the pursuit of growth is inherent in human nature, apart from the economic system. I think the growth ideal already exists in modern societies, and it is broadly accepted as a fact. Hence, the arguments of growth proponents depend on the assumption that human beings are always in pursuit of more well-being, richness, and better living conditions, independent of the political/economic system in which they live. Therefore, they always demand growth to consume more. Kallis argues that the assumption that humans do not have the ability to control their production and/or consumption, i.e., they have no limits and always intend to grow more, is a foundational myth of capitalism: “The ideas of limitless needs and eternal scarcity are a central feature of capitalism, which produces scarcity and needs it to justify its relentless expansion of the means of production” (Kallis 2019b, p. 270).

In fact, humans’ dispositions often strengthen this articulation—that the pursuit of growth is inherent in human nature—with their actions of concurrence and passion<sup>14</sup>. It is claimed that when people aim for better living conditions with abundance, this necessarily entails growth in material production to maintain the possibility of more and a variety of consumption. Likewise, Nelson (2024) argues that growth proponents try to convince people that mass poverty can only be eliminated by material growth. Likewise, Klitgaard (2023) asserts that it is still a dominant expectation in society that economic growth and technological change will improve our life quality and save us from the misery of poverty. According to Hickel, people do not care about an increase in an abstract number—namely, what GDP refers to—they pursue growth because they want to consume more, which necessarily requires an increase in materials and energy usage. Hickel says, “If GDP growth did not come along with an increase in material consumption, people would not pursue it” and asks the following question: “What is the point of having a higher income if it does not enable you to expand military spending, buy bigger houses and faster cars, or pay people to do things for you?” (Hickel 2020, p. 1106). I think here Hickel aims to

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<sup>14</sup> Being a Marxist, I believe that this approach of humans comes from the substructure relations of capitalism, which determines the superstructure in society. Therefore, again, the capitalist mode of production is responsible for such a disposition in human beings.

show that growth is not an abstract, immaterial phenomenon, but rather it depends on continuous energy and resource use, leading to the exploitation of both human labor and nature. Moreover, Hickel realizes that the capitalist hegemony deliberately created this false image. In other words, various agents in capitalism always promote more production and consumption in the name of growth, asserting that this will ease people's lives and maintain high-quality life standards and social well-being for all. Hickel thinks that society is persuaded by the idea of growth in this sense.

As explained in detail in the previous chapter, capitalism is a system that cannot sustain itself without growth. Growth is inherent in capitalism, and it is not the same as progress or development. Instead, it points to the capital accumulation in favor of the interests of the capitalists. In this regard, I think that the imposition of perpetual growth for better living standards is articulated by the capitalist propaganda machine, and it deliberately misleads the masses. Because what is growing here is the capital; growth does not enhance the living conditions of poor people. However, it has often been argued that a growing economy in capitalism will have a positive impact on the common benefit of society. The capitalist propaganda aims to conceal the exploitative mechanism of capitalism in the name of growth. Besides, this perspective disregards the class distinctions in society and assumes that we are all in the same boat.

Furthermore, even if we accept the validity of these arguments for an instant—people pursue growth because they want to consume more, and this will ease people's lives—it cannot be taken for granted that economic growth has yielded social well-being and better living conditions, at least for the majority of the population. Though proponents of the growth idea consider growth necessary to flourish human life, there is no evidence that the masses have better life standards in growing economies in today's capitalist world. Even in the Global North's rich countries with high production levels and high scales of GDP, the current dominant economic system has never fulfilled millions of people's basic needs. Hickel (2023a) explains this issue with the organization of the productive forces around the interests of capital rather than around the interests of people. He maintains that as a result, millions of children are living in poverty in the Global North; for example, a quarter of the population

lives in substandard housing, and nearly half cannot afford health care in the United States (ibid). Hickel points to history to recognize that what is required for progress is not growth at all but a fair distribution of income and opportunity, and access to universal public goods (Miller-McDonald 2021).

Moreover, Hickel (2023a) considers this debate—whether more growth can improve people's life standards—a crucial point in questioning the meaning and purpose of growth. Apropos, we should bear in mind that what Hickel means by growth is capitalist growth. For Hickel, growth as we know it does not mean social progress or improvements in social well-being. Instead, it is very narrowly defined as an increase in aggregate production, as measured in market prices, namely GDP (ibid). At this point, Hickel gives the following example to state clearly the logic of the capitalist economy regarding the idea of growth:

GDP makes no distinction between \$100 worth of tear gas and \$100 worth of health care. This metric is not intended to measure what is important for people but rather what is important for capitalism. Of course, what is important for capitalism is not to meet human needs or achieve social progress but to maximize and accumulate capital. If social progress and well-being are our goals, it is not the market value of aggregate production that matters but rather what we are producing (tear gas or health care?) and whether people have access to essential goods and services (is the health care privatized or universal?) (Hickel 2023a).

Similarly, Empson (2024) states that regardless of the consequences of any activity, GDP welcomes all aspects of the economy that encourage growth. For instance, some negative events that even lead to ecological damage can be taken as positive for GDP calculations in case they contribute to economic activity (ibid). Empson refers to David Pilling<sup>15</sup>, who argues that GDP is not an adequate assessment since it only works in line with the interests of capitalists:

<...> GDP likes pollution, particularly if you have to spend money clearing it up. It likes crime because it is fond of large police forces and repairing broken windows... It does not deign to count transactions where no money changes hands. It does not like housework, and it shuns all volunteer activities. In poor countries, it struggles to account for most human endeavors, the bulk of which take place outside the moneyed economy. It can count a bottle of Evian in the supermarket, but not the economic impact of a girl in Ethiopia who trudges for miles to fetch water from a well (Empson 2024).

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<sup>15</sup> A journalist working for Financial Times.

At this point, the degrowth idea comes into the scene and questions the growth imperative of capitalism, which pledges improved well-being and abundance for the masses. The degrowth idea similarly posits providing for the basic needs of the people while maintaining social well-being, equality of opportunity, and environmental justice for people without appealing to growth—i.e., reducing the use of natural resources, throughput, and energy. As it is not within the scope of this study, I will not make any big effort here to analyze what people’s basic needs are and what else people may demand more than their basic needs. Still, it might be stimulating to deal with a few points. I think this question—what people’s basic needs are and what else people may demand more than their basic needs—is related to the different historical progress of different societies. In other words, what people of the Global North will consider basic needs differs from those of an average African, who is, for instance, even deprived of sanitary potable water. This is obviously a matter of class distinctions.

Löwy (2020) refers to Ernest Mandel, who explains the relationship between basic needs and human behavioral inclinations as follows:

The continual accumulation of more and more goods is by no means a universal and even predominant feature of human behavior. The development of talents and inclinations for their own sake, the protection of health and life, care for children, and the development of rich social relations... all these become major motivations once basic material needs have been satisfied.

Löwy, in his same work, imagines the view of a new ecosocialist society regarding the basic needs of people: “A new society would orient production towards satisfying authentic needs, beginning with those that could be described as ‘biblical’—water, food, clothing, housing—but also including the essential services: health, education, transport, and culture” (Löwy 2020).

When growth is considered to be inherent in the capitalist mode of production, and if degrowth is manifested as a challenge to the growth paradigm, one might infer from these premises that the idea of degrowth is a direct challenge to capitalism. However, as stated before, since degrowth literature is very complicated and heterogeneous, it will not be easy to obtain this conclusion. I doubt that the degrowth idea directly

stands against capitalism. In my opinion, this discussion is important to ponder the political stance of degrowth. Before proceeding with the following section—the suggestions and solutions of degrowth to the ecological crisis—let us keep this question in mind to discuss further: Is degrowth a solid strategy in the field of environmentalism, or is it just a utopia? Or, in a red meat rhetoric, is degrowth, with its original assertions, really desirable?

#### **4.3. The Goals and Suggestions of Degrowth Proponents and Their Solutions to the Ecological Crisis**

Today's ecological and social crises are important matters of debate among scholars from various disciplines. Thus, we can listen to Hickel to reveal the significance and urgency of the situation we have to deal with:

We face a double crisis as the twenty-first century unfolds. On the one hand, it is an ecological crisis: Climate change and several other Earth System pressures exceed planetary boundaries to a dangerous extent. On the other hand, it is also a social crisis: several billion people are deprived of access to basic goods and services. Over 40 percent of the human population cannot afford nutritious food; 50 percent do not have safely managed sanitation facilities; and 70 percent do not have necessary health care (Hickel 2023b).

Under these circumstances, as Hickel clearly describes, it can be argued that any environmentalist theory should devise a good plan to prevent a possible apocalypse. Moreover, Hickel asserts that without analyzing and resolving the social situation simultaneously, no political program that promises to examine and solve the ecological crisis can hope to succeed (ibid).

As I explained in Chapter 3, in the era of the Anthropocene, it is generally accepted that the leading cause of the ecological crisis is the exploitation of nature by humans. Over-production and over-consumption necessarily entail a material increase in energy and resource usage, the plundering of natural resources, and lead to environmental problems. As Kallis states, the faster and the more we produce and consume goods, the more we damage the natural environment (Kallis 2018, p. 1). Hence, it is almost common sense that humans should scale down their utilization of natural resources. Degrowth is an idea/stance that profoundly aims to reduce the use

of energy and resources concerning planetary boundaries while simultaneously achieving social well-being and equity for all (Hickel 2023a; Kallis 2018, p. 4). Likewise, Demaria et al., challenging the hegemony of growth, express that “degrowth calls for a democratically led redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialized countries as a means to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice, and well-being” (Demaria et al. 2013, p. 209). Aiming at social and ecological sustainability, the degrowth project is a voluntary societal shrinking of production and consumption (ibid., p. 192).

Despite its complexity and heterogeneity, degrowth is a compelling idea and a very assertive stance in environmentalism. Nevertheless, though the main arguments and goals of the degrowth idea sound admirable these days, where the future of our world is in jeopardy, I believe there is still a problem of plausibility in degrowth. This is because the degrowth idea does not introduce sufficiently palpable formulations. Regarding the global warming issue, for example, Burton and Sommerville refer to Pollin, who argues that degrowth thinkers have not produced a viable set of policies to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions to sufficiently lower levels to stabilize global temperatures (Burton and Sommerville 2019). They agree with Pollin that the degrowth movement has generally concentrated on a critique of GDP growth and has not prioritized formulating detailed policy proposals (ibid). Hence, I think degrowth proponents should assert more concrete solutions to mitigate the repercussions of the ecological crisis and convince people that the idea is not utopian. In other words, it is fair enough to expect some solid suggestions from the theory of degrowth to stop or at least scale down environmental degradation.

Furthermore, even though I consider it a mystery how the projected prosperity and abundance can be achieved following degrowth policies, I think it would be unfair to argue that degrowth is utterly utopian and does not offer anything tangible. To begin with, degrowth is taken as a direct challenge to the growth imperative; therefore, it negates perpetual growth as a societal goal. Since growth entails an increase in material usage, this negation is an essential point, on its own, concerning environmental degradation. For instance, considering degrowth as an ethical and political decision-making process, Akbulut explains the goals of degrowth as a

reduction of material and energy usage in a differently organized economy. Moreover, she regards degrowth as “reimagining and reconstructing the economic sphere where democratic decisions can be made” (Akbulut 2021, p. 101). Mentioning the significance of a decrease in energy usage, Hickel (2020b) states that degrowth has a discriminating approach to reducing economic activity; i.e., it does not call for all forms of production to be reduced. He argues that, on the one hand, degrowth seeks to scale down ecologically destructive and socially less necessary production (the production of SUVs, private transportation, cruises, industrial beef, advertising, etc.); on the other hand, it seeks to expand universal public goods and services, such as health, education, transportation, and housing that people need to lead flourishing lives (Hickel 2020b, p. 1108). He says, “These measures abolish unemployment and economic insecurity for the masses and ensure the material conditions for a universal decent living” (Hickel 2023a). Similarly, Işıkara says that degrowth proponents argue that the proper question is not more or less but rather “more of what and less of what?” (Işıkara 2023).

Compatible with these societal goals—for instance, Hickel (2023a) mentions that degrowth scholarship works on clear and concrete suggestions/policies proposing qualitative changes in people’s lives—many degrowth proponents recommend some practical measures, such as a way out of fossil fuels, using less energy, enabling rapid decarbonization, and transition to renewables as an immediate solution to the ecological breakdown. Heron (2022) expresses in the same manner that, despite the disagreements within the degrowth movement, “most of its adherents envision a future where food production is localized, people have democratic control over issues that affect them, renewable energy infrastructure is decentralized and collectively owned, and public transportation is commonplace.” Similarly, Akbulut (2023) suggests a biophysical scale-down rising from grassroots organizations, renouncing extractivism for fossil fuels, organizing the economy democratically and equitably, and accomplishing a self-limitation regarding the biophysical limits of nature. Demaira et al. (2013) also remark on similar material formations of the degrowth idea as a solution to the ecological crisis as follows:

<...> Practitioners, on the other hand, promote local, decentralized, small-scale, and participatory alternatives such as cycling, reuse, vegetarianism or veganism, co-

housing, agro-ecology, eco-villages, solidarity economy, consumer cooperatives, alternative (so-called ethical) banks or credit cooperatives, decentralized renewable energy cooperatives (Demaria et al. 2013, p. 202).

Likewise, Nelson (2024) states that degrowth proponents suggest a different way of living with localized economies of organically grown food, ecologically self-managed houses, small-scale production, and community-supported agriculture. In this regard, she focuses on the role of collective activities and the democratic decision-making process in degrowth, which will ensure convivial living for people.

Even though almost all degrowth discourse highlights similar political and economic formation shifts and individual lifestyle changes concerning a reduction in consumption to establish social well-being, prosperity, and equity—for example, Kallis states that to prosper without growth, we must establish a radically different economic system and way of living, in which we extract, produce, and consume less and do it all differently (Kallis 2018, p. 1)—I think it is still an enigma of how these radical transformations can be implemented/materialized. As far as I can see, the idea of degrowth does not explicitly elucidate this impasse.

#### **4.4. What is Degrowth Thinkers' Political Stance Concerning the Ecological Crisis?**

“People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairytales of eternal economic growth. How dare you?”<sup>16</sup>

Feeling the alarming threat of global climate change, there has been a rising awareness of the ecological crisis. In this sense, it can be argued that the worsening situation also distinctly increases environmental concerns. Although the ongoing ecological crisis cannot be reduced to the consequences of climate change, it has become a commonly held argument that global climate change is the center of the ecological crisis. Thus, with the fear of the annihilation of the planet, a wider range

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<sup>16</sup> Greta Thunberg. A popular Swedish environmental activist who works to address the problem of climate change.

of people are involved in the environmental debate and are searching for a solution to stop—or at least mitigate—environmental degradation. However, I argue that before working on a viable solution to the ecological crisis, the first step should be pointing out the underlying causes. Çoban states that it is not possible to find a solution to climate change without answering the following questions: “What are the causes of climate change? Who is responsible for today’s climate crisis, and who are the ones suffering deadly from the changing climate?” (Çoban 2022, p. 8). I think the answers to these questions will put forth the political standpoint of the different ideas in environmentalism. Hence, I find Çoban’s questions extremely significant in analyzing the political stance of the degrowth idea. Likewise, Miller-McDonald (2021) argues that for the degrowth idea to get desirable traction, it should be abundantly clear about what it stands for and rejects. Since degrowth was introduced as a response and solution to the current catastrophic ecological situation, the political stance of degrowth thinkers should be examined because what we face today as an environmental crisis is directly a matter of politics.

Throughout the previous sections, I tried to put forth various definitions along with the arguments and goals of degrowth and discussed degrowth’s approach to the growth imperative of capitalism. It can be argued that degrowth emerged from the critique of growth and later progressed as an alternative to the social and economic outcomes of the hegemony of growth. I think most degrowth thinkers successfully construe the relationship between economic growth and ecological problems. As stated in the previous sections, degrowth thinkers articulate that the pursuit of growth will necessitate extensive use of resources, throughput, and energy to increase production. Since this production process is heavily dependent on fossil fuels today, the more humans appeal to natural resources for growth, the more the environment is destroyed. In this sense, when we examine degrowth thinkers’ standpoints concerning the ecological crisis, it can be argued that they see the growth paradigm as the primary cause of the problem. However, the question still remains: Do we feel satisfied when growth, per se, is seen as the main cause of environmental problems? In other words, can growth be decoupled from economic, social, and power relations? Or, what does it politically mean to reject growth in the sphere of environmentalism?

It is widely stated in the degrowth literature that degrowth calls for reversing the processes behind growth, such as accumulation and commodification. In fact, this is a call for a differently organized, new society. For example, according to Saito (2024), in order to organize society differently and develop a new way of living, we should first abandon the growth paradigm. Again, Hickel (2022) says, “progressive negation of growth should be a new society of democratically planned resource allocation, joint ownership, and solidarity ethics.” For Hickel, to manage the downscaling of material and energy use that human survival urgently requires, a projection of a new society is necessary (ibid). While calling for a new society, along with the critique of the growth paradigm permeated into our lives, Klitgaard, for instance, locates degrowth against capitalism and argues that since capitalism depends on continuous capital accumulation and growth, it is not possible to apply degrowth under capitalism (Klitgaard 2023). Klitgaard argues that a contradiction exists between capitalism—which pursues continuous accumulation and growth—and the material world. This contradiction is the center of the current planetary-level crisis, and it threatens the ecosystem. We can see a similar approach in Nelson (2024) when she considers degrowth as a holistic, anti-capitalist, socio-economic movement, imagining post-capitalism. She argues that degrowth requires a collective transformation respecting humanity and the Earth (ibid).

As a reply to Çoban’s question regarding the causes and responsibilities, it can be argued that degrowth directly holds the growth imperative responsible for environmental degradation. Considering the relationship between the growth imperative and capitalism, it would not be wrong to assert that the distinguished degrowth proponents do not rule out the role of capitalism in today’s ecological breakdown, and the degrowth idea has a post-capitalist political imagination. In this regard, I argue that during the envisioned societal transformation in degrowth, the role of the dominant economic system in the ecological crisis should be condemned, and the ways or methods to overcome capitalism should be explicitly articulated. Işıkara criticizes degrowth, for the theory is far from judging and criticizing the foundations of capitalism:

<...> The degrowth paradigm, on the other hand, which is much more dynamic and heterogeneous, problematizes capitalism and the growth imperative inherent to it and

thereby pushes the discussion to more radical grounds. Yet still, instead of disrupting the foundations upon which capitalism as a mode of production rises, it is contented with suppressing the outcomes (Işıkara 2020, p. 95).

On the one hand, the idea of degrowth and its proponents seem to have a political stance against capitalism; on the other hand, they show an ambiguous approach when it comes to directly challenging the capitalist mode of production as the primary cause of social and ecological destruction.

To sum up, briefly, with the awareness of the planetary-level ecological crisis and the role of capitalism in this situation, degrowth offers an appropriate entry to post-capitalist thought (Miller-McDonald 2021; Akbulut 2021; Nelson 2024; Kallis 2021). In this sense, Rok (2024) indicates that degrowth is searching for new paths and alternatives to capitalism. Nevertheless, I believe degrowth holds great uncertainties about how this post-capitalist society could be built and what this society would look like in terms of political and economic relations. In his interview with Miller-McDonald (2021), Hickel tackles this issue by answering the following questions raised by Miller-McDonald: “Does the degrowth idea have its own ideological program, or is it a supplement to existing traditions, both, or something else? In this sense, is degrowth a more immediate stopgap to halt the extinction and climate crises or more long-term civilization-building?”

## CHAPTER 5

### PROBLEMS RELATED TO DEGROWTH AND A CRITIQUE OF DEGROWTH FROM A SOCIALIST PERSPECTIVE

“Our blinkered vision of growth has brought us into a situation where we might become the first species to bring about its own extinction. The tragedy is that we will not go alone.”<sup>17</sup>

During the interview with Hickel, Miller-McDonald (2021) argues that the idea of degrowth has a heterodox environmentalist political economy that is compatible with various anti-capitalist programs. According to Hickel, degrowth suggests a critical and alternative path that addresses a wide range of movements, which is actually degrowth's power (ibid). Hickel construes the short and long-term aspects of degrowth in that interview as follows:

It is definitely not just a stopgap to halt ecological breakdown because it is not just about ecology. Degrowth represents an approach to halting ecological breakdown that is just and equitable. It requires a different kind of economy and a different kind of society. In that sense, yes, it does represent civilization-building. But it also has an undeniable immediacy to it. These are things that need to be done now, starting this decade, for us to have anything like a reasonable chance of stopping dangerous climate change (Miller-McDonald 2021).

As stated many times in this study, degrowth is a newly emerging idea/stance in environmentalism with various interpretations. The complexity and heterogeneity of degrowth may often lead to misunderstandings and debates as well. In this chapter, I will try to present some problems related to degrowth and discuss the main critiques of the idea of degrowth. Although degrowth has both right-wing (conservative) and left-wing (socialist) critiques, I will mostly deal with the critiques from the left, tackling the issue from a socialist perspective.

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<sup>17</sup> The New Leam, 2016.

To start with, as a Marxist dealing with environmental issues, I find the idea of degrowth and its interaction with today's environmental movements quite stimulating. However, with the ambiguities it comprises and its problem of realizability under the capitalist economy's hegemony, degrowth seems a crippled position to me as a solution to the current environmental crisis. Throughout the thesis, my criticism toward degrowth will be constructive, not destructive, because I consider the arguments and goals of degrowth significant. Suppose the problems related to degrowth can be surmounted by merging them with the theory and praxis of socialism; I believe a key to today's impasse in environmental movements can be developed.

In this chapter, I will first examine the ambiguities in degrowth literature based on the definitions and propositions of several thinkers that I presented in Chapter 4. The ethical and political stance of degrowth and the corresponding controversies of the degrowth idea will be stated in this part. Second, degrowth's arguments regarding power relations and cultural and geographic distinctions will also be analyzed. Third, the problems related to its methodology, praxis, and strategy, as well as the lack of proposing a clear agency to achieve the goals, will be explored. Later, the debate and rapprochement between degrowth thinkers and Marxists will be scrutinized. For this part, I plan to set forth both the separation and proximity of degrowth arguments with socialism. Regarding my critical study, this section is supposed to be a vital part of this chapter. In the last section of this chapter, a comparative interpretation of the arguments of some prominent degrowth thinkers will be given.

Before starting my analysis in detail, I would like to clarify one essential point: I argue that degrowth's timid approach to the mechanism of capitalism is problematic since I see the capitalist mode of production as the ultimate cause of today's ecological crisis. Many degrowth thinkers do not expressly stand against the foundations of capitalism and do not propose a solid change outright in the capitalist mode of production. In this regard, like many socialists dealing with ecology, I see it impossible to implement most suggestions of degrowth unless the capitalist mode of production is overthrown with a social transformation. However, as far as I am concerned, degrowth proponents are far from heading for a direct confrontation with capitalism.

The methodology problem of degrowth, as well as the unclearness of the agency to achieve the goals, are also significant parts of my criticism. To put it another way, how can degrowth policies be materialized, and what is the appropriate agency for implementing such policies? Which instruments should be used to reach the ultimate goals of degrowth? Under what conditions can the arguments of degrowth be materialized? In this sense, I think it would be better to determine the proximate and ultimate goals of degrowth first and then discuss the means to achieve these ends. This argumentation also stands for the philosophical problem of justification regarding the materialization of degrowth's suggestions; i.e., what are the means to reach the ends, and are these means justifiable? The formulation of this means-end justification model is quite important here because degrowth deals with highly practical issues. Therefore, such a justification of methods should be instrumental to achieving the ends; i.e., an instrumental justification should be satisfied. To put it in another way, can the proposed methods of degrowth materialize the ends? Considering this means-ends dialectic, the identity of the agent and the role of the agency should also be discussed. For instance, what kind of power/agent do we need to materialize the ideas of degrowth, and how can this power—with which instruments and methods—achieve the ultimate goals? Besides, is it possible to actualize degrowth policies within the limits of capitalism? If the apparatus of capitalism tries to hinder the suggestions of degrowth concerning the societal model it envisions, what is then the appropriate agency to remove the obstacles? Sections 5.3 and 5.4 of this chapter will particularly deal with these problems.

Given that degrowth is a popular concept in environmentalism and that many scholars either argue for or against it<sup>18</sup>, I think it would be valuable to put forward the problems and drawbacks related to degrowth without ruling out its contributions to ecological movements and struggles. Hence, throughout this chapter, I will first discuss the ambiguities, problems, and critiques of degrowth; and then, in Chapter 6, express my interpretation of the role of degrowth concerning the current ecological crisis. In other words, I will try to answer the following question: Is degrowth a viable solution to today's ecological breakdown?

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<sup>18</sup> In the field of environmentalism, we often encounter disciples and detractors of degrowth. In this sense, degrowth is a prevalently discussed idea regarding its complexity and heterogeneity.

## **5.1. The Ambiguities in Degrowth Literature**

Andreucci and Engel-Di Mauro (2019, p. 177) argue that degrowth's diverse and potentially contradictory positions result in the unclearness and difficulties of the degrowth idea. I think the political and ethical inexplicitness in degrowth, as well as the standoffs concerning the practical implementations, elicit extensive discussions among scholars and environmentalists. In this part, I want to discuss these ambiguities in degrowth via the arguments of some prominent degrowth thinkers. I argue that most of the criticism toward degrowth comes out of these uncertainties in the literature.

### **5.1.1. A Political or an Ethical Stance?**

Among the many difficulties in describing the idea of degrowth clearly, I think one of the most important confusions about degrowth is its ethical and/or political standpoint. For me, it is controversial whether degrowth can only be seen as a moral stance or if it foresees a political and social transformation beyond that interpretation. Actually, different interpretations of various degrowth thinkers strengthen this controversy. For instance, Andreucci and Engel-Di Mauro (2019, p. 185) allege that the degrowth movement has developed fundamentally around an ethics of consumption and proposes self-limitation for individuals. Akbulut (2023) asserts in the same manner that degrowth was treated by many ecologists for a long time as a moral policy focused only on the outcome of the capitalist system, aiming to reduce consumption. However, she states that degrowth goes beyond this interpretation today, with its critique of the current economic model and suggestion of autonomous, self-governing structures as an alternative (ibid).

Hickel, reminding us of the positioning of degrowth against the growth imperative of capitalism, explains the ethical dimension of degrowth in his interview with Miller-McDonald as follows: "If the ideology of growthism offers an ethic of constant amoral expansion and exploitation, degrowth(ism) offers a more restrained ethic that values an abundance of time, leisure, love, and equality over-concentrated wealth and distributed waste" (Miller-McDonald 2021). Moreover, Hickel relates ethics to

politics, articulating that degrowth has added an anti-imperialist ethic to ecosocialism. For Hickel, since high levels of consumption in the Global North rely on extraction and appropriation from the Global South, the call for degrowth in the Global North also means a call for decolonization (ibid).

In the previous chapter, I discussed the political stance of degrowth thinkers concerning the ecological crisis with a comparison of the thoughts of some foremost scholars. Performing an analysis of the degrowth idea around clear political issues, I have tried to put forward the political transformations that degrowth suggests. Furthermore, the moral individualistic approaches in the degrowth discourse concerning the human-nature relationship were given. Hence, is degrowth an ethical or political stance, or is it a combination of both? Does degrowth only suggest a different ethical approach of humans to nature, providing individualistic, self-limiting solutions and cultural and moral attitudes based on lifestyle changes? Or does it imagine a model of a new society with solid suggestions? When we look at the definitions of degrowth by several scholars, one can notice that the degrowth idea is beyond an ethical stance. It has often been stated in the degrowth literature that degrowth imagines a new societal formation; i.e., it comprises strong political arguments. However, one can still see suggestions of individual cultural shifts or moral approaches in the degrowth literature.

Above all, I should mention that I do not separate what is ethical from political; rather, I consider these two as interrelated topics. Especially in the field of environmentalism and environmental philosophy, I think it would be a mistake to decouple ethics from politics. Nevertheless, I believe that we should insist resolutely on stressing the importance of the political dimension of the ecological crisis that we face today, since the very political decisions have a decisive role in the potentially catastrophic environmental future. In this regard, Çoban (2024) argues that when we only concentrate on ethical discourse in the context of society-nature relationships in the environmental debate, there is a risk of missing the political stance. According to him—though ethics is important in environmentalism because we tend to protect ethically valued entities—when such big narratives are at stake, focusing solely on ethics can make us overlook the class distinctions and power relations regarding

environmental issues (ibid). Even though a proper ethical approach to nature is necessary for environmental concerns, I argue that crimes against nature cannot be explained solely by ethics. As I stated before, Sarkar says, “No matter what ethical norms we choose to embrace if we want to be of practical help in solving or even ameliorating environmental problems, we must find a way to translate those norms into policy” (Sarkar 2012, p. 45). Considering the concreteness, urgency, and scale of today’s ecological problems, I believe morality per se cannot be a proper tool for avoiding environmental degradation. In other words, focusing barely on ethical discourse cannot yield a viable solution to the problem. Thus, we need a clear political standpoint and corresponding political action to change the worsening ecological situation. As a result, without ignoring the moral parts of the degrowth discourse, I will mainly try to focus on the political transformation that degrowth foresees.

I think degrowth discourse and literature are filled with both ethical and political aspects. For example, degrowth can be seen as a cultural-ethical revolution aiming to change human behavior and the human approach to nature in the sense that it argues for a self-limitation of less consumption. Nevertheless, the degrowth idea not only proposes a change in individual and cultural perspectives but also calls for societal and political transformations. For instance, Kallis (2019a), on the one hand, argues that the emphasis on a culture of self-limitation is a distinctive part of degrowth from other currents of thought. On the other hand, Kallis, in one of his other studies, quotes from Eleanor Finley as follows: “Degrowth, Finley argues, should not be seen as a project of constraining ourselves within the limits of an external nature but as part and parcel of liberation from oppressive relations of domination and hierarchy” (Kallis 2019b, p. 269). Kallis says that, for Finley, the problem in human relations is based on hierarchy, and this hierarchy also leads to the exploitation of nature by humans (ibid). I think Finley articulates a clear political stance in line with Murray Bookchin’s thesis on social ecology<sup>19</sup>. Andreucci and Engel-Di Mauro (2019, p. 184)

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<sup>19</sup> Murray Bookchin, an American social theorist and political philosopher, 1921-2026. “Bookchin argues that our relationship with nature will mimic the structure of our society. If we organize society around hierarchy, domination, and extraction, then our relationship with nature will have the same character” (Ecosocialism is the Horizon, Degrowth is the Way: A review of *Less is More* and interview with Jason Hickel, Samuel Miller-McDonald, 2021).

also give reference to Finley and state that for Finley, degrowth proponents have maintained a negative imaginary of humanity as a destructive force inherently encroaching upon nature. Finley points out the similarities between the 1980s deep ecology and degrowth regarding the anti-humanist and anti-civilizational tendencies of deep ecology, whose traces can also be seen in the degrowth movement (ibid). Andreucci and Engel-Di Mauro think that the approach to humanity as a destructive force on nature leads the degrowth movement to focus on self-limitation.

Focusing on the moral stance on the idea of degrowth, Research and Degrowth (2024) makes an analogy between degrowth and the Latin American concept of *Buen Vivir*,<sup>20</sup> which was formulated by Indigenous communities. Research and Degrowth states that Indigenous worldviews deny the nature-culture dichotomy of Western modernism and consider human and non-human beings in a continuous interaction. Similarly, the idea of degrowth suggests simplicity in the lives of human beings, allowing space for non-humans to survive on Earth (ibid). Research and Degrowth (2024) also argues that this simplicity and community-based lifestyle proposition in degrowth will yield human flourishing and well-being, which is very similar to the interpretations of *Buen Vivir*. Moreover, considering the ethical stance embedded in the idea of degrowth, I also see the traces of Aristotle's concept of 'eudaimonia' in these human flourishing and social well-being arguments (ibid).

Concerning Hickel's book *Less is More*, Miller-McDonald states that Hickel offers an animistic spirituality and biocentric ethics as a part of the degrowth agenda. Hickel responds to this argument by expressing the importance of amplifying the voices of Indigenous leaders (Miller-McDonald 2021). Hickel argues that we need much space for the thinkers who are connecting anti-colonial struggles and post-capitalist visions with such animist ontologies. According to Hickel, this is not spiritualism as criticized by many, but rather, it is a matter of radical politics (ibid). Hickel, for instance, finds the Red Nation Movement<sup>21</sup> with the tagline "All

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<sup>20</sup> *Buen Vivir* is a concept emerged in Latin America, which simply means living well in harmony. It is an alternative to Western idea of development, mainly raised by Indigenous societies. Being a part of a community in brotherhood and without exploiting others are the basis of this viewpoint.

<sup>21</sup> Red Nation Movement describes themselves as a group "dedicated to the liberation of Native peoples from capitalism and colonialism, that center Native political agendas and struggles through direct action, advocacy, mobilization, and education" (therednation.org).

Relatives Forever” and the Rights of Nature Movement<sup>22</sup> with its consideration of ecosystems as persons promising and inspiring (ibid). As far as I am concerned, Hickel thinks that degrowth should be leavened with all these historical backgrounds.

As I mentioned above, the arguments of several degrowth thinkers grasp different political and ethical aspects in the field. Therefore, I think there has not been a definite separation between the ethical and political stance in degrowth. For example, Nelson (2024) considers degrowth a revolutionary agricultural self-sufficiency strategy, stating that degrowth challenges our way of thinking and priorities regarding quantity vs. quality, money vs. ecology, and competition vs. collaboration. According to her, even though degrowth initially arouses a feeling of austerity and poverty, it actually aims for social and ecological justice and sustainability (ibid). Demaria et al. (2013, p. 195), drawing attention to a critique of ‘homo-economicus’<sup>23</sup> as a source of degrowth, argue that degrowth embraces various aspects of thinking more than any single philosophical thought. Moreover, as a movement of voluntary simplicity, reduction in consumption, and a critique of lifestyles based on maxims of working more, earning more, and consuming more, degrowth is a quest for societal well-being (ibid, p. 197). In other words, degrowth aims to set forth a set of newly emerging values. In this sense, Demaria et al. assert that the degrowth theory has an anti-utilitarian and deontological perspective (ibid).

Among these interpretations, Andreucci and Engel-Di Mauro indicate (2019, p. 184) a significant point: In some studies, degrowth’s permanent criticism of growth is accompanied by moralistic condemnation of the lifestyle choices of individuals. However, I think this individualistic interpretation of degrowth is also contentious since many degrowth proponents do not acknowledge that critique. For instance, Hickel expresses that degrowth does not problematize the behavior of individual

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<sup>22</sup> “The Rights of Nature” movement is fundamentally rethinking humanity’s relationship with nature, and it is gaining momentum. It is led by activists advocating for ecosystems such as rivers, lakes, and mountains to bear legal rights in the same, or at least a similar, manner as human beings. This movement is striving for a paradigm shift in which nature is placed at the center and humans are connected to it in an interdependent way, rather than a dominant one” (Tiffany Challe, Columbia Climate School, April 2021).

<sup>23</sup> The concept used for the consideration of human beings as economic agents driven by self-interest and utility maximization.

consumers as in mainstream environmentalist thought. Rather, it criticizes the structure and logic of the prevailing economic system, namely, capitalism (Miller-McDonald 2021). I think that this is one of the tensions between the degrowth thinkers and Marxists—whether degrowth is an individualistic cultural perspective or a concrete political solution to the environmental crisis.

As I tried to explore in Chapter 3, the liberal approaches to environmentalism have an effort to burden the responsibility of the ecological problems on individuals and offer individualistic solutions to this colossal global risk. These liberal environmental policies mainly focus on changes in the lifestyles of individuals, such as self-limitation, consuming less, etc. Huber (2022, p. 132) criticizes such policies in the sense that without fulfilling the basic needs of people, these policies by no means meet the interests of the majority of people worldwide, who have limitations imposed on them (or whose access to the basic means of survival is denied) through the very structure of the capitalist system. If the idea of degrowth holds only an ethical stance and tends to point to such individualistic lifestyle transformations, then degrowth would have no peculiarity worth discussing since it will not differ from the liberal perspectives in environmentalism that I heavily criticize. However, I can infer from the very political arguments above that the political dimension of degrowth outweighs the ethical part of the idea.

### **5.1.2. Austerity or Egalitarian Abundance?**

One of the inexplicitness related to the idea of degrowth is about the promises that it makes. In sections 4.1 and 4.2, I have often emphasized that degrowth imagines and encompasses a social and political transformation challenging the growth imperative of capitalism, which is considered to lead to an ecological crisis due to its perpetual need for the overuse of energy and material throughput. In this sense, the main objective of the degrowth idea, as asserted by many of its thinkers, is to form a new social model of fair distribution and justice, securing the social well-being of people, compatible with ecological sustainability. Degrowth proponents suggest an exit from today's growth-based economic system, staying in line with nature's limits. For instance, Hickel praises degrowth, stressing that degrowth can achieve this reduction

while improving human well-being and ensuring good lives for people. For Hickel, this is the core principle of degrowth, which can be posited as an entry into the post-capitalist world.

However, it sounds a little confusing to me when it is argued that social well-being can be maintained with a smaller scale of production (and consumption as well) with less energy and resource usage. Therefore, it would be a valid question to ask whether it is possible to improve the living standards of the masses with such a scale-down that degrowth asserts. In this sense, does the degrowth idea envisage austerity or egalitarian abundance for people? I think this is a crucial question that needs to be clarified. I argue that degrowth policies do not clearly present the possibility of obtaining social well-being for the masses with a reduction in material throughput and energy. Thus, degrowth's arguments are far from convincing people that they will benefit from the formulations of degrowth.

Huber (2023b) suggests the term 'politics of less' to explain the policies of degrowth, stating that degrowth's programmatic definitions put forward a formulation of downscaling and reduction in various fields. Huber problematizes the pledges of degrowth proponents as follows:

Imagine what it would take to give the entire planet public housing, public transit, reliable electricity, and modern water-sewage services. Now, imagine trying to achieve this while also shrinking aggregate material resource use. To say the least, this sounds like a difficult task (Huber 2023a).

Some right-wing populist politicians scorn degrowth's proposals similarly, claiming that degrowth cannot propose anything for the advantage of people exposed to poverty; rather, degrowth thinkers pave the way for more poverty and austerity. These politicians make propaganda against degrowth, stating that what degrowth posits will make the lives of the people struggling with poverty—particularly people working for low wages—more difficult because degrowth calls for a reduction in material and energy use. Likewise, Hickel indicates that some "bad-faith commentators" have attempted to represent degrowth as primitivist austerity, intrinsically harmful, especially to the people of the Global South (Miller-McDonald 2021).

In this regard, I think Ross Clark can be considered a “bad-faith commentator” that Hickel mentions. He states that the degrowth idea mainly appeals to the middle classes and “revolves around matters of taste as much as the environment” (Clark 2023). Clark continues his arguments against degrowth proponents with a diatribe:

If you are a nurse, ambulance driver, driving examiner, or a member of the many other groups who have been striking about the failure of your wages to keep pace with inflation, your enemy is not Hunt<sup>24</sup>; it is the degrowthers. It is they who want to reduce the buying power of your wages year on year. If a conservative minister were to say, ‘Nurses, why don’t you forget your pay claim and learn to live life with less, to concentrate on mental wellbeing rather than material goods?’ the sky would fall in (Clark 2023).

Regarding this discussion, Empson (2024) alleges that working people have been exposed to heavy attacks on their living standards, especially since the 2008 global financial crisis. Under these circumstances, degrowth’s reductionist slogans could be understood as new attacks on the material conditions of the working class (ibid). Further, Empson (2024), in his study, quotes Matthew Huber, who strongly criticizes the idea of degrowth with the following question: “In a capitalist system defined by deprivation, who will support a program centering reduction?”. Embracing Huber’s arguments, Empson adds that if degrowth proponents cannot apart degrowth from austerity, the idea will be very far from getting support from the working class (ibid). Similarly, Driscoll (2024) asserts that degrowth does not offer an adequate theory of political transformation, and he indicates the difficulty of embracing degrowth policies, especially for emerging economies in the Global South.

As stated many times throughout the study, degrowth is often explained with the arguments of forming a different society and a different way of thinking and living. In this sense, the question of whether degrowth is a palpable theory or if it only consists of a utopia is significant concerning the critiques of degrowth. The ambiguities and controversies in the degrowth discourse make it difficult to give a straight answer to this question. I think this is a problem of realizability for degrowth’s propositions.

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<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Hunt: British Chancellor of the Exchequer, 2022-2024.

### **5.1.3. Are Power Relations and Social Distinctions Considered by Degrowth Thinkers?**

In this part, I will try to discuss the inadequacy of the degrowth idea regarding the social, economic, and geographic distinctions and power relations worldwide. I argue that degrowth arguments cannot be offered everywhere. I believe this discussion will also help us ponder the realizability of the idea of degrowth.

Being a challenge to the growth imperative of capitalism, degrowth envisions and introduces an alternative way of thinking; it suggests a new economic and societal model in which material throughput and energy are reduced to be compatible with nature. Hence, degrowth is proposed as a solution to the world's current ecological and social crises. However, can degrowth be applied to the different regions of the world with different social and economic characteristics and historical backgrounds? In other words, can we discuss any idea in environmentalism today without considering the socio-economic and geographic distinctions? Can power relations, hegemony, imperialism, invasions, and wars be ignored in the environmental debate? Besides, can we argue that degrowth reckons with all these facts about our world?

I argue that any idea dealing with environmental issues should take into consideration the inequalities throughout the world and suggest appropriate methods concerning these distinctions. For instance, it is widely mentioned that not all human beings suffer from the consequences of the ecological crisis at the same level. For instance, Shotwell asserts, as an example of climate injustice, that people experience more of the harm of global warming if they are living in poverty or in nations that have been colonized (Shotwell 2016, p. 202). As experienced in various cases, people of the Global South suffer more severely from environmental problems, such as droughts, floods, and pollution. Besides, the worst impacts of the ecological crisis are felt by the nations and regions of the Global South that have had very little negative impact on the environment. So, can degrowth cure the pains of the Wretched of the Earth<sup>25</sup>?

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<sup>25</sup> *The Wretched of the Earth*: a 1961 book written by Frantz Fanon.

In this regard, when degrowth's clear position against growth is at stake, defending degrowth in the Global South seems controversial since degrowth explicitly suggests a downscaling in production. In other words, it is not certain whether degrowth and its proposals are desirable in the Global South, where millions of people are deprived of their basic needs. In my opinion, it is not convincing that an idea or a stance mainly focusing on reducing production and consumption can heal the misery of the poor. In this sense, I consider it a mystery how the projected prosperity and abundance can be achieved for the masses following degrowth policies. Thus, the preferability of degrowth is questionable, especially in the regions where people live in deep poverty and deprivation.

Löwy, on the one hand, admits that the countries of the Global South need development; on the other hand, he believes this development can be sustained in a different way, compatible with the arguments of degrowth:

<...> The 'underdeveloped' countries of the Global South (Asia, Africa, and Latin America), where basic needs are very far from being satisfied, will need a process of 'development' including building railroads, water and sewage systems, public transport, and other infrastructures. However, there is no reason why this cannot be accomplished through a productive system that is environmentally friendly and based on renewable energies. These countries will need to grow great amounts of food to nourish their hungry populations, but this can be much better achieved—as the peasant movements organized worldwide in the Via Campesina network have been arguing for years—by a peasant biological agriculture based on family units, cooperatives, or collectivist farms (Löwy 2023).

Regarding this debate, Hickel is probably the most distinguished degrowth thinker, who focuses on the distinctions between the Global North and the Global South while defending the idea of degrowth. First, Hickel explicates that since degrowth aims to reduce the excess use of energy and resources, degrowth's suggestions do not apply to economies that do not use high amounts of resources and energy. Second, for him, "capital accumulation in the core depends on draining labor and resources from the periphery" (Hickel 2023b). Hence, economic growth in the Global North requires the appropriation of resources worldwide, and this structure has a colonialist background in the Global South (Hickel 2021). In this regard, he introduces the term 'ecological debt' concerning the differences between the Global North and the Global South. Nelson (2024) states in the same manner that tension exists between

the Global North and South perspectives of degrowth, and degrowth cannot be applicable in the Global South. However, she believes that the idea of degrowth can still meet the struggles for decolonization and environmental justice in the Global South.

As I previously quoted, Hickel, in his interview with Miller-McDonald (2021), focuses on the importance of speaking of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism in environmental issues and praises degrowth in this context. According to Hickel, degrowth brings an ethic of anti-imperialism in the sense that high consumption in the Global North relies on extraction and appropriation in the Global South, and degrowth considers these dynamics (ibid). Likewise, according to Jason Moore (2023), the role of imperialism is fundamental in ecological problems, and we need a distinction between imperialist and colonized countries. He states that anyone talking about climate justice must necessarily be anti-imperialist because we cannot talk about a democratic transition, climate justice, for instance, without demanding the withdrawal of the armies of the imperialist countries from other regions of the world (ibid). Foster (2023a) points to the colonialist background in the growth of the Global North as well, asserting that economic growth requires the appropriation of resources, mainly in the Global South. According to Foster, the appropriation of land and exploitation of labor and nature are hidden behind growth, and this is not only unsustainable but also unjust (ibid). Even though what Foster mentions is about the primitive accumulation and the enclosure process throughout the development of early capitalism, I think we can still notice the same exploitation methods in line with the interests of the capital. For example, the separation of local people from the land by appropriating rural areas in favor of extractivist projects widens poverty today. With its refusal of the growth imperative of capitalism, exploiting both nature and human labor, Foster thinks that degrowth pays regard to deprivation in the Global South. Similarly, Demaria et al. (2013, p. 200) defend the degrowth idea, arguing that degrowth positions itself as “an ally of the global environmental justice movements,” which has strong historical roots in the Global South.

As most explicitly mentioned by Hickel, many degrowth thinkers argue that degrowth policies cannot be implemented in the Global South since it is not possible

to actualize reductionist policies in regions exposed to poverty. Instead, they foresee and plan to reduce the material and energy usage in the Global North, which they think will directly lead to reduced production and consumption. Degrowth thinkers believe that this reduction in the Global North will help stop the exploitation of both nature and humans in the Global South as well.

In my opinion, degrowth policies, in general, do not sufficiently reckon with the functioning of the world system. In other words, I argue that degrowth's assertions, without touching upon these political relations, are not plausible in their original position. When discussing any global environmental policy, I believe we do not have the option to overlook power relations and the hegemonic structure in our world. For instance, according to a recent study<sup>26</sup>, "rebuilding Gaza after Israel's bombardment would come at an environmental cost of 60 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, and this amount is more than the annual emissions of 135 individual nations." Considering the arguments of that study, how can we merely focus on and offer a reduction in production as a solution to this environmental degradation under these circumstances? I believe that without considering the role of wars and invasions in today's ecological destruction, any theory in environmentalism will be crippled. As ground for my assertion, I think the Libyan floods of 2023 would be explanatory. The floods in September 2023 caused the loss of more than 10,000 lives in Libya. Although it was an environmental disaster, one cannot rule out the role of the imperialist invasion in 2011 in this catastrophe, which destroyed all the infrastructure of the country. In this sense, it is not the consequence of the ecological crisis per se, but rather the very consequences of imperialist intervention that had demolished the country.

To conclude this part, I argue that the arguments of the degrowth proponents do not sufficiently consider the role of power relations and social, economic, and geographic distinctions worldwide. If degrowth is not an applicable theory in the Global South, as accepted by many degrowth proponents, what do we offer as a concrete solution for billions of people in the Global South? Degrowth thinkers respond to this question with an alliance of the degrowth idea with the anti-colonial

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<sup>26</sup> Published by Harriet Reuter Hapgood on 07.06.2024 in Euronews.

social movements of justice in the Global South. However, with its anti-growth and anti-developmental arguments, I think it is not clear whether the movements of the Global South will agree with the arguments of degrowth or whether people living in that territory will demand what degrowth proposes. Moreover, if we hope for help from anti-colonial social and environmental justice movements of the Global South—which are on their own quite influential—for the sake of ecological well-being, then why do we need such a new stance like degrowth?

Although degrowth proponents are trying to integrate degrowth policies into the movements of the Global South, we cannot rule out the fact that, among all other assertions, the main idea of degrowth is downscaling resource use, material throughput, and energy transition. Therefore, I think degrowth policies as such are not compatible with the economies of poor nations. Moreover, what can be said about the class politics of degrowth in the Global North, i.e., about the people of the Global North who are living in poverty and deprived of their basic needs? Hence, how do we reconcile degrowth with the reality of working-class poverty in the world's rich countries? Can poor people in rich and developed countries be persuaded by degrowth policies that suggest a socio-economic model limiting their consumption?

Furthermore, I believe it is still uncertain how the rich and dominant countries will consent to a downsizing in their production for the good of poor nations and the sake of nature. This question leads us to the methodology problem in the degrowth idea.

## **5.2. The Methodology Problem in Degrowth**

Among many critiques of degrowth, I think one of the most vital criticisms of the degrowth idea is about realizability, i.e., its inadequacy in the possibility of materialization. I argue that the ambiguities in degrowth literature also pave the way for this realizability problem.

Degrowth envisions a new economic and societal model characterized by a new way of living depending on reduced production and consumption via a reduction in

material and energy usage. Nevertheless, what do degrowth proponents think about materializing their policies? How can this new economic and societal system be maintained? I contend that degrowth proponents do not explicitly argue how degrowth policies and the social and economic transformation they suggest could be implemented—what are the conditions of degrowth’s realizability? They do not present concrete and powerful arguments to convince the masses about how such a society can be achieved, and I consider this a vital problem.

To begin with, I believe that the notion of degrowth is positive; the idea, its goals, and the corresponding proposals can be supported. For example, I find degrowth’s ultimate goal of a different society of equality compatible with nature and its aim of revising redistribution in favor of a democratic and just social relations model admirable. Under the permanent threat of planetary survival due to the accelerating ecological breakdown, the ultimate goal may also be defined as to survive and bequeath a livable world for future generations. Kallis (2018, p. 118) alleges that in a degrowth society, the economy is not itself an end but a means to a superior end: “the satisfaction of our biological needs and our quest for meaning.”

As the idea of degrowth positions itself against the growth imperative of capitalism, I believe it would not be possible to implement degrowth policies without overthrowing the capitalist system as a whole. In this regard, Hickel quotes Murray Bookchin, who expressed the relationship of capitalism with growth and mentioned the difficulty of decoupling these two: “Capitalism can no more be persuaded to limit growth than a human being can be persuaded to stop breathing” (Hickel 2020a, p. 78). Thus, considering how capitalism is addicted to growth and profits, I think one must ponder how the goals of degrowth can be achieved without changing the capitalist mode of production. Or, like some degrowth thinkers argue, if a radical change/transformation in the economic and social system is considered, what should be the proper instruments to overcome such a tough and dominant system, supported by state power? Many degrowth proponents continuously criticize capitalism and imagine a post-capitalist society. However, it is not explicit what kind of system the degrowth idea suggests, whether such a system change is considered. As Işıkara (2023) rightly questions, “Taking capitalism as a whole mode of production, what

are we to replace the central elements of capitalism in a post-capitalist or degrowth society?” In this regard, as an example, Işıkara states that since the free market is the central coordinating mechanism in a capitalist economy, degrowth thinkers should offer a solid alternative in their post-capitalist society to the regulating role of the market in capitalism (ibid).

Based on a poll conducted at the 2014 International Degrowth Conference in Leipzig, Schmelzer et al. speak of the envisioned transformation to a degrowth society:

Attendees largely agreed that economic growth without the destruction of nature is an illusion and that, therefore, industrialized countries need to equitably downscale production and consumption; they also mostly agreed that, consequently, the rich will have to do without some amenities to which they have become accustomed, and that the transformation to a degrowth society must come from below, will be peaceful, and will require overcoming capitalism and patriarchy (Schmelzer et al. 2022, p. 17).

Regarding the applicability of degrowth, Demaria et al. (2013, p. 205) state in the same manner that it remains unclear in the degrowth literature how the socio-ecological transformation might take place at macro scales and which institutions should be involved in this transformation. Maintaining doubts about the possibility of such a transformation, similar questions are raised by Klitgaard (2023): “What would a transformation towards economies that prosper without growth look like, and under what conditions may that transformation be realized? What policies and grassroots practices could catalyze it?” Klitgaard also argues that nearly all degrowth thinkers know the difficulty of implementing degrowth’s suggestions (ibid). Moreover, Klitgaard draws attention to the inadequacy of the degrowth literature regarding the possible resistance against its policies:

The degrowth literature contains little on the resistance the transformation will encounter, not only from workers and consumers, who see their provisions reduced but from the power of the capitalist class to resist any limitations on their power to accumulate. We should expect such a pushback from capitalists themselves, from a barrage of advertising and media, and from hired politicians (Klitgaard 2023).

Similar concerns can be seen in Kallis’s arguments. For instance, Kallis states that it would be unrealistic to expect that the ruling classes would release their power and

renounce their interests in the name of a broader common good (Kallis 2018, p. 141). Likewise, Huber (2023b) highlights the importance of possessing power for the realization of degrowth arguments and states that the solution to ecological issues within a capitalist economy is not degrowth itself but rather the control and power over resources. I think Huber shows us below how we can overcome the possible resistance against degrowth policies that Klitgaard expressed:

The ecological crisis is a problem of power. Capitalists have all the power to control the social relation to nature—and will destroy it in the interest of profits. So we need a kind of counter-power—a social force that can wrestle control over production and investment, to guide society toward a sustainable production system. This is a class struggle over power (Huber 2023b).

In Chapter 4, I extensively discussed the connection between the capitalist mode of production and the growth imperative. Capitalism's pursuit of endless growth arises from the system's very nature. Therefore, it would not be rational to imagine that the capitalist system would voluntarily renounce its core principle and driving force. Empson (2024) considers it impossible for capitalism to operate differently since the growth imperative always entails more production with excessive usage of energy and material throughput. Again, we come to the same point: given that the hegemon economic system strictly positions itself against degrowth policies, what are the appropriate methods to achieve our goals, i.e., to maintain the societal transformation envisaged by the degrowth paradigm? To answer these questions, Kallis refers to Latouche, who defines degrowth as a process of building an autonomous, convivial society and making its own laws (Kallis 2018, p. 10). Nevertheless, it is again ambiguous how this autonomous society can be founded under these circumstances. There is no exact information about the instruments to be used during the formation of this new society. For instance, to part with the growth imperative of capitalism, are we going to seize the means of production and consequently seize the state power in favor of the working class and the interests of the masses?

Likewise, Işıkara (2024) points to this unclearness in the degrowth literature, indicating that degrowth proponents deliberately refrain from discussing the mode of production and focus on an imaginary post-capitalist society concerning lifestyle choices. According to Işıkara, since the social relations on which growth is built are

inherent in capitalism, it would be wrong to abstract growth from the underlying mechanism, namely the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, degrowth thinkers must openly fight capital accumulation and the capitalist system to reach their ultimate goals (ibid).

However, as absurd as it is to imagine a capitalist economy that does not grow, it is equally absurd to think that one can move beyond capitalism without overturning the property relations that are the basis of capitalism, without replacing the market mechanism and the pursuit of profit with other means and processes that will take on the function of organizing production (Işıkara 2024).

Concerning the methods to achieve the ultimate goals of degrowth, another problem is the reorganization of the economy in this envisioned post-capitalist society. In other words, how will we organize production and reproduction with the propositions of degrowth? For instance, as stated above, Işıkara questioned the surrogate of the role of the market in the capitalist economy. Latouche calls for an exit from the dominant economic system in the name of autonomy and democracy compatible with degrowth policies (Kallis 2018, p. 6). Similar to Latouche, Andre Gorz also responds to this problem with autonomous small-scale economic structures (Akbulut 2023). However, we encounter the problem of methodology once again: How can this autonomous model be realized/materialized under the hegemony of market relations? What is the appropriate subject of such a transformation to autonomous structures?

Concerning the subject of degrowth, Kallis (2019b, p. 268) refers to Vergara-Camus, who argued in the same manner that these autonomous decisions on production entail the collective control of the laborers over the means of production. This discussion leads us to the problem of agency in degrowth literature; in other words, which subjects/agents have the ability and capacity to realize the ultimate goals of the degrowth idea? I will try to analyze this issue in the following section.

### **5.3. The Agency Problem in Degrowth**

“The history of all hitherto existing societies  
is the history of class struggles.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *The Communist Manifesto*: Book written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1848.

Taking inspiration from Chico Mendes's<sup>28</sup> famous quote, “Environmentalism without class struggle is just gardening”, Jason Hickel tweeted on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022: “Environmentalism without class struggle is using paper straws while the rich take 9-minute flights in their private jets.”

For me, it is evident that today's ecological breakdown has resulted from the mechanism of capitalism. Thus, while considering a solution to stop environmental degradation to sustain the planet's future, we must explicitly challenge the capitalist mode of production. Furthermore, I believe that solely criticizing capitalism is not enough in this urgent ecological crisis; instead, a concrete alternative model to capitalist relations and the capitalist economy should be articulated. As Marx stated in his 11<sup>th</sup> Thesis<sup>29</sup>, the point is not only to interpret the world but rather to change it. Therefore, a palpable strategy to overthrow the capitalist mode of production should be suggested, and the corresponding agents to implement this strategy should be formulated.

Regarding the agency in degrowth literature, Kallis (2019b, p. 268) refers to Stefania Barca, who asks, “What political subjects and which processes of political subjectification can make degrowth happen?” Barca claims that degrowth scholarship and activism currently feed upon the middle class of intellectuals, which is not enough to widen the theory to the masses (ibid). Similarly, Löwy (2023) draws attention to the importance of the subject in the struggle for degrowth, refusing to feature the traditional industrial workers. Rather, he proposes an extensive, intersectional subject, such as women, peasants, and Indigenous people, for the environmental struggle (ibid). Löwy's agency includes the oppressed of the world from different social layers, as well as the groups that have already been experiencing the ecological destruction of enormous extractivist projects in favor of capital accumulation.

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<sup>28</sup> Francisco Alves Mendes Filho (15 Dec.1944 - 22 Dec. 1988): known as Chico Mendes, was a Brazilian rubber tapper, trade union leader, and environmentalist. He fought to preserve the Amazon Rainforest, and advocated for the human rights of Brazilian peasants and Indigenous people. He was assassinated by a rancher on December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1988.

<sup>29</sup> *Theses on Feuerbach*: Book written by Karl Marx, 1845.

Huber argues that the weakness of the degrowth movement comes from the fact that its principles and programs are only embraced by a tiny minority of society:

In my book, I argue that the degrowth movement is purely a movement of a highly educated professional class. It is a program embraced almost entirely by people with PhDs or on their way to getting PhDs (there are some exceptions). In the United States, at least (not sure about the UK), this is something like 2% of society (and degrowth is certainly not embraced by anything like a majority of that 2%, I would guess!) (Huber 2023b).

Huber, in his same work, accepts that the elements of the degrowth program, such as shorter working hours and universal basic services, can be embraced by vast portions of the population, and these demands considerably overlap a socialist working-class agenda. According to him, since a solution to the ecological crisis, which is created by capitalism, is at stake, and since the power of capital should be eroded to stop environmental degradation, there exists historically no force other than the working class with the potential to build the power we need (ibid).

Huber (2023b) once again criticizes the agents of degrowth, stating that “degrowth is an insular politics of the professional class unlikely to resonate with the masses of ordinary workers facing material deprivation and economic insecurity.” Huber’s definition of professional class here refers to academics, NGO staff, intellectuals, journalists, and white collars in the field. According to him, these are the ones leading the current environmental discourse (Huber 2022, p. 3). Moreover, Huber alleges that these professional class members are far from understanding the working class masses’ everyday material needs and interests. Hence, what is missing in today’s environmental struggle—including degrowth—is class thought (Huber 2022). I think the most significant part of Huber’s criticism toward degrowth is related to the agency problem and the inadequacy of degrowth in meeting the needs of working-class people. Furthermore, for Huber (2024), degrowth policies wrongly point to consumption and lifestyle changes rather than focusing on the role of capital in environmental degradation.

As an anchor to his articulations, Huber gives the example of the struggle of the Yellow Vests Movement in France to understand the attitude of the masses. Starting

in November 2018, the protests widened throughout France against the carbon fuel taxes imposed by the French government, the corresponding high cost of fuels, and the increasing cost of living for the poor. Huber interprets this tax implementation of the government as an anti-working-class climate policy and quotes the slogan of the demonstrators to support his interpretation: “The politicians care about the end of the world when we have to care about the end of the month” (Huber 2022, p. 39). It can be argued that Huber construes degrowth policies from a similar perspective, arguing that with the goal of downscaling production, consumption, and material usage, the degrowth idea cannot recognize the interests and demands of working-class people or the oppressed groups of the world. Driscoll (2024) points to the same example in France, comparing degrowth policies with carbon-tax advocacy in the sense that carbon-tax supporters aim to decrease consumption like degrowth thinkers. He mentions the corresponding unrest of low-income citizens resulting from the increase in their living costs, claiming that similar attitudes can be seen toward degrowth policies (ibid).

Since Huber is so sharp and rigorous in his arguments, his criticism toward degrowth is well-followed by many degrowth thinkers. For instance, Hickel (2021) mentions that Matthew Huber dismisses degrowth as “a preoccupation of middle-class environmentalists in the Global North who feel anxiety about excess consumption.” As Hickel expresses, for Huber, the degrowth movement cannot connect with the Global North's working class and the Global South's social movements, where mass poverty and deprivation are widespread (ibid). Likewise, Işıkara (2023) argues that when degrowth focuses its lens on overproduction, consumption, or unsustainable energy and material transition rather than the structural formation of the capitalist mode of production, degrowth appeals to well-off individuals in central capitalist countries. Similarly, Saito (2024) says that Marxists criticize degrowth in the sense that it posits an inadequate folk politics of local, minoritarian, and small-scale propositions having no impact on global capitalism.

In this regard, Empson (2024) clearly expresses the need for a socialist society to improve the well-being of the masses and defines the subject to achieve the goals as follows:

<...> Achieving this goal of a socialist society requires the mass mobilization of the working class, impoverished people, and oppressed groups in both the Global North and South. In the short term, the struggles waged by these groups will be over-expanding their share of the economic surplus. In these battles, particularly (though not only) in the Global South, slogans of degrowth can be a barrier to those fighting to improve their lives against the greed of capitalism. Our strategy and slogans must recognize the real threat of ecological disaster and relate to working people's and the oppressed living struggles.

From the arguments above, it can be inferred that many degrowth critics doubt that degrowth policies can be desired and welcomed by the millions of masses forced to work and live in harsh conditions and deprived of their basic needs. Similarly, I believe that degrowth, as such, mainly appeals to Western middle classes/intellectuals and cannot go beyond academic discourse. Degrowth policies do not meet the demands and interests of the masses living in poverty and do not relate to the problems of oppressed and marginalized groups of people worldwide. Since degrowth slogans do not appeal to their material needs, degrowth, on its own, has no chance of getting their support. In this regard, when a political idea or stance cannot connect with the masses, it is not possible to find people to fight in the direction of these political ideas. For instance, who will bear the responsibility and ambition to struggle against the ruling system that perpetually exploits and destroys nature? Then, what should be the actual subject of this struggle that degrowth envisions? If degrowth addresses the 'professional class' as Huber calls it, i.e., if the agency in degrowth consists of these academics and intellectuals, can these groups have the capacity to organize and struggle for such a societal transformation?

At this point, we may discuss the role of the working class in the environmental debate. However, two questions may appear here: First, can the proletariat, as conventionally characterized, be offered as the suitable agent to fight against the current ecological breakdown? Besides, what do we understand from the term 'proletariat' today? Does it point to the industrial working class in our orthodox understanding, or as widely discussed, do we have to take different groups of intersectionality, such as women, immigrants, and peasants, into consideration? As an example, Huber's approach to this issue is closer to the conventional industry proletariat, mostly working in the energy and mining sectors, and having the ability to block the fossil fuel industry. Huber argues that an appropriate way to relate the

working-class interests in the environmental crisis is by considering their insecurity as the basis of environmental politics (Huber 2022, p. 5). He states that our energy and food system should be transformed to be compatible with nature and that “working-class people’s basic needs overlap precisely with the very sectors we need to decarbonize” (Van Horn and Turner 2022).

#### **5.4. The Debate and Rapprochement between Degrowth Thinkers and Marxists: How does Degrowth Relate to Socialism?**

In the previous sections, I stated that most degrowth scholars always bypass socialism as an alternative while criticizing capitalism's harm to nature. For instance, I have often cited Kallis throughout my work—because Kallis is one of the pioneers of the degrowth literature—and I believe that Kallis refrains intentionally from naming a socialist system with a planned economy as a solution to the ecological crisis. However, I think Kallis’s arguments for a degrowth society, stated below, are very similar to a socialist model:

In a degrowth society, core resources, goods, and infrastructures, such as health, education, water, and energy, will be governed and shared as a commons with egalitarian direct democratic processes. If the economic product is going to be smaller, as it will be in a degrowth scenario, the only way to avoid facing scarcity is to share the smaller product, securing conditions that enable everyone to have enough. The basic goods that are needed for everyone’s survival should be made accessible free from payment, based on the rights and duties of citizenship (Kallis 2018, p. 120).

I think that to build a bridge between the arguments of political ecology and the thesis of Marxism, the most accurate way is to focus on the role of capitalism in environmental degradation. We live in an age of ecological crisis caused by capitalism’s continuous plundering of nature; therefore, I argue that we should openly portray the capitalist mode of production as a target and explicitly argue for a socialist world model while searching for a solution to the current ecological crisis. In this sense, as an individual supporting the ideology of socialism, I believe it is worth discussing the similarities and differences between the idea of degrowth and socialism since some degrowth proponents seem to support socialism/ecosocialism. Before analyzing the proximity and differences between these two, it would be

proper to articulate why I am trying to appeal to Marxism in environmental issues once again. Çoban (2021) explains the need for Marxism in the ecology debate with the following arguments: “Marxism indicates the source of ecological problems (capitalism), shows us the solution to the problem (a socialist society), and points at the agent/subject to solve the problem (the working class).” In addition, the class concept in Marxism teaches us not to burden the responsibility for environmental harm on all humans.

Degrowth’s statements mostly criticize capitalism, condemning the imperative of growth, which is indispensable to capitalism. Considering the role of capitalism in the ecological crisis, I think that many degrowth policies very much resemble socialist/ecosocialist models, and suggestions of the degrowth idea are in line with the practices of socialism as well. However, degrowth proponents do not openly argue for a socialist system as a solution to the ecological crisis while criticizing capitalism. In this sense, where does degrowth stand politically in the field of environmentalism? For example, how do degrowth policies differ from socialism? Should we define the idea of degrowth as an independent political stance apart from both capitalism and socialism? Moreover, despite their post-capitalist imagination and the similarity of arguments of degrowth and socialism concerning a new societal model, why do degrowth thinkers deliberately keep themselves away from socialism?

Işıkara (2024) puts forward a similar criticism toward degrowth proponents, expressing that among all arguments of the degrowth discourse, degrowth scholars somehow manage to draw back from the doorstep of socialism. According to Işıkara, degrowth proponents take a pragmatic position at this point and intentionally refrain from the great historical political debate between capitalism and socialism. Instead of directly targeting the capitalist mode of production and arguing for a socialist model, they focus on growth as the primary cause of today’s ecological breakdown (ibid).

As I discussed in Chapter 4, some degrowthers posit a sort of cultural revolution based on individual lifestyle changes. Moreover, many degrowth proponents propose local, autonomous forms of small-scale production and local grassroots movements

instead of colossal movements of a social revolution to achieve the goals. Işıkara (2023) says that if degrowthers aim to replace capitalism and argue for a societal transformation, we need a model more than self-management, small-scale production, and autonomous structures. Işıkara argues that socialism is grounded on use-value instead of exchange value and profits, and it aims for production for the needs of society rather than the interests of capital (ibid). For instance, degrowth does not consider these value debates. Furthermore, socialism highlights central social and economic planning instead of the market mechanism of capitalism (Işıkara 2023). However, we cannot see palpable concrete alternatives to the apparatus of capitalism in degrowth's articulations.

Criticizing the ambiguities in the idea of degrowth and the timid approach of degrowth proponents to defend socialism, Huber addresses degrowthers and distinguishes the goals of socialists as follows:

<...> So, comrades, what I want to suggest is that you really do not want degrowth; you want a core principle of socialism: you want planning. What we want as socialists is to take social control over production so we can decide collectively and democratically decide what society needs and how to organize production, not to destroy the ecological conditions for all (Huber 2023b).

Even though I sometimes find Huber's arguments too strict and ruthless, I believe that Huber has a point when he relates the idea of degrowth to the theses of socialism:

I think there actually is common ground that a traditional socialist and working-class perspective on the environment shares with the degrowth agenda: namely, we all want to take democratic control over the economy and guide toward the production of use values over profits; we all want an economy geared toward meeting human needs and ecological sustainability. The question we need to grapple with is how to actually win the scale of transformation we all agree is necessary (Huber 2023b).

Empson (2024) explains that capitalism's growth imperative has a unifying side between Marxists and degrowthers since the consequences of the capitalist system, such as inequality, injustice, oppression, and exploitation, are also of great interest to both sides (ibid). He argues that the statements of degrowth proponents resemble Marxist arguments in the sense that they both point to capitalism as the culprit of

environmental destruction. Moreover, they both imagine a world of equity, justice, and democracy. However, he is unconvinced about the adequacy of degrowth for the masses concerning the impending environmental catastrophe (ibid). In this sense, he hopes to develop a vision and collaboration of these two in the struggle for a sustainable and equitable world.

Like Empson, degrowth per se is not seen as a viable strategy for many Marxist scholars in the field of ecology. Therefore, paying attention to the arguments for degrowth, they either try to unify degrowth policies with different political movements or find ways to integrate the degrowth idea into their socialist imagination. For example, Kohei Saito considers degrowth to be only possible in a post-capitalist, communist society, which would involve “the equal, communal management of the means of production as a form of commons via democratic municipalism and citizen assemblies” (Saito 2024). Saito defends his arguments by articulating the term ‘degrowth communism’, arguing that Marx was actually a degrowth communist (ibid). Likewise, Schmelzer et al. (2022, p. 27) praise the core perspective and proposals of degrowth and consider degrowth a form of an integral part of the larger “movement of movements”, necessary for a globally just and sustainable future for the masses. They claim that the origin of degrowth was rooted in anarchist environmental groups and movements against large-scale industrial infrastructure projects as well as in campaigns for car-free cities and eco-villages (ibid., p. 25). Demaria et al. (2013) argue in the same manner that degrowth is a frame that can provide the potential to create a network of movements, including academics, activists, politicians, and scientists.

Considering the arguments of some Marxist scholars dealing with ecology that I have stated so far, it can be argued that there is an effort by some degrowth thinkers to relate degrowth to socialism. For instance, according to Löwy, ecosocialism and degrowth have been coming together in the last few years, and “each side has been appropriating the arguments of the other, and the proposal of an ecosocialist degrowth has begun to be adopted as a common ground” (Löwy 2023). In this sense, Löwy, on the one hand, endeavors to integrate degrowth with socialism; on the other hand, he aims to put forth the differences between them. He praises the struggles

around concrete issues of degrowth in the sense that they contribute to raising ecological and socialist consciousness while promoting grassroots organizations. Moreover, he clearly distinguishes degrowth and ecosocialist degrowth as follows:

Ecosocialist degrowth includes the need for substantial reductions in production and consumption, but does not limit itself to this negative dimension. It includes the positive program of a socialist society based on democratic planning, self-management, production of use values instead of commodities, gratuity of basic services, and free time for the development of human desires and capacities—a society without exploitation, class domination, patriarchy, and all forms of social exclusion. <...> Ecosocialist degrowth does not have a purely quantitative conception of degrowth as a reduction in production and consumption. It proposes qualitative distinctions. Some productions—for example, fossil energies, pesticides, nuclear submarines, and advertising—should not merely be reduced but suppressed. Others, such as private cars, meat, and airplanes, should be substantially reduced. Still, others, such as organic food, public means of transport, and carbon-neutral housing, should be developed (Löwy 2023).

Regarding the proximity of degrowth with socialism, Kallis lists some suggestions for concrete policy actions, such as a universal basic income, a guaranteed minimum wage, a reduction in working hours, progressive taxation, equity, and so on. He claims that ending exploitation requires a change in relations of production, with workers' collective control of their means of production through cooperatives (Kallis 2018, p. 132). Although it is controversial whether these radical policies and the consequent transformations could be implemented by degrowth—without a revolutionary transformation that would overthrow the capitalist state—what Kallis practically offers is also in the program of many socialist parties worldwide.

Among all these similarities and the effort to unify the arguments of degrowth with socialism, the different approaches of socialists and degrowth proponents should also be discussed to lead a comprehensive discussion. For example, Işıkara (2023) argues that socialism embraces an intended increase in labor productivity and the development of productive forces in general, with higher and more central levels of coordination, planning, and management. The primary function of production under socialism is to provide all citizens with a universal standard of basic needs (ibid). Similarly, Özbudun and Demirer (2024) indicate that in order to achieve Marxism's aim of overcoming the alienation of humans from his/her labor, society, and nature, productive forces should be developed as much as possible. Nevertheless, several

degrowth thinkers permanently criticize the Marxist arguments regarding the emphasis on the development of productive forces because they think this development inevitably leads to harm to nature. They heavily condemn the socialist theory and its founders, Marx and Engels, as Promethean<sup>30</sup>, as they are primarily focused on increasing production. They claim that Marxists, with their orthodox approach, overlook the environmental problems related to the historical development of productive forces. However, for Marx and Engels, the development of productive forces is actually a matter of socialization of production and the development of conscious collective control over production (Özbudun and Demirer 2024).

Huber (2023a) states that, while the point of socialism is to free human potential from the constraints of the capitalist economy, degrowth seeks to limit our future political programs regarding production. I think this is a significant difference between degrowth and socialism, as degrowth offers local, small-scale, and autonomous structures for production instead of central planning and the development of productive forces. Similarly, Empson alleges that democratic planning of the economy would determine the level of production under a socialist system. According to Empson (2024), although degrowth thinkers have anticapitalist imagination in common with Marxists, they do not aim to destroy the capitalist system.

To conclude, regarding the elucidations of many scholars discussed above, I can see many similarities between the goals of the degrowth idea and socialism. At least, I find the suggestions of degrowth to be compatible with the arguments of socialists. However, it is my opinion that not all degrowth proponents have such a clear political stance. Their arguments are often focused on political movements and organizations in environmentalism, which do not pose a real alternative to capitalism. Rather, socialism, as a mode of production, is a direct challenge, confrontation, and alternative to capitalism. For me, it is obvious that degrowth intends to limit and reshape capitalism; i.e., degrowth imagines a post-capitalist society, as stated in

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<sup>30</sup> In environmentalism, Prometheanism is considered very similar to productivism. It is mainly defined as the addiction to human progress/development depending on the subjugation of nature for the sake of human purposes.

previous sections. However, by focusing mainly on growth rather than the mode of production, aiming to reduce material throughput and energy consumption, and proposing a cultural revolution of lifestyle changes, degrowth seems to be a reform of capitalism. In other words, since degrowth proponents do not explicitly argue for a socialist world system, I think what they suggest looks like a sort of tamed capitalism.

Huber (2024) has a similar viewpoint. He argues that although some degrowth policies are compatible with socialist programs, degrowth's main orientation focuses on reductionist policies, which are very distinct from socialism. Similarly, Kallis references Vergara-Camus, who suggests emphasizing class relations and the preconditions for capital accumulation instead of concentrating on growth. For him, degrowthers should consider "the separation of laborers from the means of production, alienated labor, the imperative and dynamic of competition, and the limited nature of liberal democracy" (Kallis 2019b, p. 267).

I think that degrowth's focus on social well-being in a post-capitalist imagination of an egalitarian society compatible with nature is not apart from the goals of socialist theory. Solid suggestions of degrowth, such as reduced working hours, guaranteed jobs for the masses, determining a minimum wage, satisfying the basic needs of people, and improvements in public services, health, and education opportunities, coincide with the socialist experiences. Furthermore, the degrowth agenda, questioning the hegemony of growth, has already met with some political and ecological movements. Thus, degrowth has a significant standpoint in the field of environmentalism, and Marxist ecologists can work on the progressive aspects of the degrowth idea.

However, as I have extensively discussed in Chapter 4, degrowth literature is not unique. For some degrowthers, improvements or reforms within the existing system are seen as enough for ecological sustainability. For some other scholars, degrowth is a direct challenge to capitalism, and an exit from the hegemonic capitalist economy through cooperatives and autonomous structures is necessary for planetary survival. Furthermore, Marxist degrowth proponents have a distinctive effort to integrate

degrowth into the socialist agenda. Given that degrowth literature does not explicitly argue for overthrowing the capitalist mode of production to achieve its goals, I think the unclearness concerning the relationship between degrowth and socialism prevails. In this regard, although I see degrowth as a stance close to socialism, I cannot consider the degrowth idea, on its own, as a part of the imagination of a socialist world.

## **5.5. A Comparative Interpretation of the Arguments of Some Degrowth**

### **Scholars**

Up to now, I have tried to define the degrowth idea via the arguments of some scholars and discuss the goals and solutions of degrowth regarding the ecological crisis. Moreover, I have made an effort to analyze the political stance of degrowth proponents, arguing that the idea embodies versatility in the field of environmentalism. Given that the degrowth idea is mainly built around the critique of the growth imperative of capitalism, the aim for a downscaling in material and energy throughput is commonly expressed, and a need for a reduction in production and consumption is highly articulated by most of the degrowth thinkers. Besides, it is again widely stated that the idea of degrowth cannot be reduced to anti-growth or anti-developmental policies. For many scholars that I discussed in Section 4.1, degrowth is a multidimensional stance, and it goes beyond the refusal of economic growth. Hence, a strong emphasis on reorganization of the economy and a democratic transition to an alternative society can be seen in the majority of degrowth thinkers of different political positions. Besides, the possibility of increasing the life standards of the masses with less energy and material usage is discussed among disciples and detractors of degrowth. However, we still encounter various interpretations of degrowth in academic literature and environmental movements following the diverse political stances that degrowthers hold.

It can be argued that degrowth's ultimate goal is the achievement of social and ecological well-being maintained through material downsizing. In other words, degrowth thinkers are concerned for ecological sustainability, and degrowth is a quest for a better, more peaceful, and ecological way of living. In this regard, when

the definitions of degrowth by several degrowth thinkers and scholars are considered, it can be seen that the degrowth idea encompasses a post-capitalist imagination and a projection of a new and differently organized society compatible with nature. In degrowth literature, the possibility of an exit from the growth-oriented economies in favor of ecological sustainability is discussed. In addition, a vision of self-limitation respecting the limits of nature and lifestyle shifts based on the renouncement of unnecessary and excessive consumption is apparent. In my opinion, up to this point, the political and ethical stances of degrowth proponents are more or less the same. Nevertheless, when the problems and ambiguities of degrowth are taken into consideration, I think various viewpoints stand out. Especially regarding the organization of a new society that degrowth thinkers envision, there exist uncertainties about how these new societal models would look. In this sense, we can notice a variety of thoughts and political positions among degrowthers and political ecologists.

Throughout my study, among many other degrowth scholars, I have often cited Giorgis Kallis, Jason Hickel, Güney Işıkara, and Matthew Huber. While Kallis and Hickel are two important contemporary scholars in the field, I have many times appealed to Işıkara and Huber as well, as they provide valuable Marxist critiques of the idea of degrowth. After indicating the common grounds in the degrowth idea, I will now try to put forth a brief comparative analysis of two foremost degrowth proponents, Kallis and Hickel, together with the comments raised by two Marxist ecologists writing on degrowth, namely Işıkara and Huber. Despite the discrepancies between their interpretations, both Kallis and Hickel think that degrowth will save our world from possible annihilation.

As stated in section 4.1, Kallis says, “To prosper without growth, we must establish a radically different economic system and way of living” (Kallis 2018, p. 1). In Kallis, economic growth is identified as the primary driver of environmental degradation, and any system, either capitalism or socialism, following the growth policies, cannot be compatible with nature. Concerning his critique of capitalism that needs perpetual growth to sustain, it can be argued that Kallis is aware of the exploitative mechanism of capital accumulation. In this regard, he seems to imagine a new

societal model beyond capitalism. However, it is unclear in Kallis's arguments what should replace capitalism to stop the exploitation of nature in the name of growth. For instance, he does not argue for a socialist state/economy instead of the hegemony of the capitalist system, which causes environmental degradation following over-production and consumption policies for the sake of profit. I believe he prefers to take a neutral stand and successfully gets around this historical political debate. In a degrowth society that Kallis imagines, there will be a fair distribution of resources, and an improvement in social well-being will be provided for all with basic income and an egalitarian democratic process of production. In this society, health, education, and energy services will be commonly governed (Kallis 2018, p. 120). However, I think Kallis has hesitations and concerns about his own arguments. For instance, Kallis states that "it would be unrealistic to expect the ruling classes to release their power and renounce their interests in the name of a broader common good" (Kallis 2018, p. 141). Again, he does not make any palpable suggestions to remove these obstacles. As far as I am concerned, Kallis's imagination of a degrowth society is free of class distinctions.

Similarly, while promoting degrowth, Hickel argues that a newly established democratic society of fair distribution is needed to negate the growth paradigm of capitalism. Apart from Kallis, Hickel supports and explicitly argues for a socialist agenda instead of a growth-oriented economy to prevent the plundering of nature for the sake of the interests of capital. Moreover, I think Hickel has a peculiarity among other degrowth thinkers in his interpretation of degrowth's position concerning the distinctions between the Global North and Global South. In this sense, he mentions that degrowth, on its own, cannot be an adequate alternative for the poor countries of the Global South. Furthermore, Hickel explicates the role of colonialist and imperialist relations in today's ecological crisis and indicates the importance of degrowth in the anti-colonialist movements. One can see an analogy between degrowth's suggestions and Indigenous movements in Hickel's works regarding the anti-colonialist aspects. According to him, supporting degrowth policies in rich countries also means a struggle for decolonization. Compared to Kallis, I think Hickel articulates more plausible strategies concerning degrowth. His ideas address the inequalities and geographic and social distinctions created by the imperialist-

capitalist world system more comprehensively. Besides, he explicitly argues for the need for socialism to replace the capitalist relations that cause the environmental harm that we face today. In this regard, I find Hickel's interpretation of degrowth more realistic.

The idea of degrowth is discussed not only by academics dealing with environmental issues, but it is also examined by many economists and political scientists comprehensively. In this regard, I gave many references to Matthew Huber and Guney Işıkara for a critical analysis of degrowth in my work. Both Huber and Işıkara handle degrowth's critique from a constructive viewpoint and criticize degrowth through a Marxist perspective, arguing that degrowth is not a viable option to solve the current ecological crisis. I argue that while Huber's critique basically points to practical issues concerning degrowth's arguments, Işıkara focuses more on the idea behind degrowth. In other words, Işıkara mainly questions the formation and structure of degrowth policies.

Huber's criticism of degrowth rests on two major problems: the plausibility and realizability of degrowth policies and the lack of an adequate agency. First, he problematizes degrowth in the sense that it is difficult to imagine the implementation of degrowth policies and to obtain the projected results. For instance, Huber (2023a) claims that it does not sound plausible to achieve degrowth's goals of social well-being while reducing material resource use. Instead, he suggests developing the productive forces and increasing production under the collective control of workers to sustain the basic needs of billions of people. Second, according to Huber, degrowth is the politics of the professional class comprising white-collar people, intellectuals, and academics. In this sense, degrowth's arguments are "unlikely to resonate with the masses of ordinary workers facing material deprivation and economic insecurity" (Huber 2023b). Since degrowth, with its goal of downscaling, cannot coincide with the interests of working-class and poor people of the world, degrowth has no chance of organizing people for a collective ecological struggle. This critique provides a basis for the agency problem in the degrowth idea. Besides, it also indicates a problem of realizability for an idea envisioning a societal transformation. Concerning the proper agency, I think Huber has an orthodox view

of the working class while emphasizing the critical role of industrial workers and their trade unions in the struggle against the fossil fuel industry. Moreover, he mentions the importance of seizing state power to provide control over resources and production. There is no such argument in degrowth literature; therefore, there exists a problem of the realizability of degrowth policies under these circumstances.

Işıkara articulates some more structural opposition against the idea of degrowth. For instance, he criticizes degrowth, for most degrowth proponents do not challenge the foundations of capitalism. Instead of indicating the capitalist mode of production as the primary cause of environmental degradation, many degrowth proponents hold growth, on its own, responsible for the ecological problems. As stated before, Işıkara (2024) argues that degrowth proponents deliberately refrain from discussing the mode of production while focusing on an imaginary post-capitalist society. Moreover, Işıkara focuses on the uncertainties in the degrowth arguments regarding the reorganization of the economy, i.e., the process of production and social reproduction. According to him, degrowth does not say anything palpable about the replacement of capitalism's core elements in the envisioned degrowth society. In this sense, some concrete suggestions, such as localized small-scale production and autonomous organizational structures, cannot be considered a tough alternative to the mechanism of capitalism. In addition, Işıkara similarly thinks that supporters of the idea of degrowth do not openly discuss the conditions of passing to such a degrowth society. In other words, what is the methodology and agency to overcome the resistance of state power to implement degrowth policies?

## CHAPTER 6

### **DISCUSSION: IS DEGROWTH A VIABLE SOLUTION TO THE IMPASSE? WHAT CAN BE DONE TO SAVE OUR PLANETARY FUTURE?**

“I don’t care whether or not you recycle. I care whether or not you stand against the rich who run the oil companies, airlines, and banks, causing global heating and Earth breakdown and the politicians doing nothing to stop them.”<sup>31</sup>

In the third chapter of my work, I criticized the liberal approaches in the field, and I argued that today’s environmentalism is at an impasse due to the wrong-headed policies of those leading the ecological debate and movements. However, I believe that without putting forth alternative solutions, any criticism on its own could be judged to be deficient. Therefore, I think we have to discuss and articulate new solutions and practices concerning the ecological crisis to save our planetary future.

Saito (2024) argues that in the time of the Anthropocene, the Earth's entire surface is fully covered by traces of human activity. He worries that we, humans, have come to the end of history, feeling the threat of the end of human civilization due to ecological breakdown. Like Saito, many scholars dealing with environmental issues allege that excessive interference of human beings with nature has posed an enormous risk to the sustainability of the planet and our future lives. So, is there a way out of this impasse? In other words, what can be done to stop—or at least to slow down—this impending annihilation?

As discussed throughout Chapter 3, I think liberal thoughts are still dominant in the environmental discourse. I argue that these thoughts lead to misinterpretation of the situation and mislead the masses. Today, we often encounter moral approaches that

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<sup>31</sup> Tweeted by Peter Kalmus on 02.06.2023. Peter Kalmus is an American scientist and writer.

reduce the ecological breakdown to the climate crisis, the climate crisis to carbon footprint analysis, and all these to the consumption of fossil fuels. In this regard, liberal policymakers promise us to wake up in a better world if we renounce the consumption of fossil fuels and make a suitable transition to renewable energy systems. Their suggestions also focus on individualistic precautions and lifestyle changes, aiming to reduce consumption.

Up to now, I have many times mentioned that environmental degradation cannot be separated from the capitalist mode of production; because, in capitalism, the goal of economic growth for the sake of profit leads to the exploitation of both land and labor, seeing nature as a free source to use and a sink to dispose. Sure enough, when concrete examples of the current environmental harm in different regions of the earth are considered, I can easily recognize the role of monopolies and capitalist enterprises—and their governments behind them—in various ways, all creating divergent environmental disturbances in the pursuit of the interests of capital. Likewise, Löwy (2023) mentions that the growth ideal of capitalism cannot go on without an extended use of fossil fuels; therefore, there is no solution to the ecological crisis within the framework of capitalism. Löwy also refers to the well-known climate activist Greta Thunberg, who said, “It is mathematically impossible to solve the ecological crisis in the framework of the present economic system” (ibid).

As a newborn idea/stance in the realm of environmentalism and as a solution proposed to stop environmental destruction, my thesis is composed of a discussion of the idea of degrowth, together with the ethical and political interpretation of the idea. In this part of my work, I want to discuss whether degrowth can be offered as an appropriate strategy and a viable solution to the ecological crisis. Furthermore, I will try to articulate what can be done to save our planetary future.

### **6.1. Is Degrowth a Viable Option to Solve the Ecological Crisis?**

Chapters 4 and 5 of my thesis present a comprehensive analysis of the degrowth idea. In Chapter 4, I tried to put forward various aspects of the idea of degrowth, such as its definition, goals, and historical development, based on the arguments of several

scholars. Chapter 5 deals with the problems related to degrowth and the criticism of the idea, mostly raised by Marxist ecologists. Taking into consideration all these issues, I will try to put forth my own interpretation of the degrowth idea in this section.

Degrowth presents the ultimate goals of maintaining ecological sustainability and the well-being of humans, reducing inequalities among people, and saving the future of the planet and human generations against the global threat of ecological crisis. In this sense, I think that the degrowth idea can be defended by the ones who have concerns about the current worsening ecological situation and who care about the future of life in the world. Nevertheless, I still doubt that degrowth, in its original formulation, can be a viable solution to the ecological breakdown that we face today because the degrowth idea contains many ambiguities and significant problems.

Since degrowth literature encompasses complexity and heterogeneity, it would be better to recall the idea behind it before going further. For instance, Demaria et al. (2013, p. 209) outline the concept of degrowth, stating that degrowth refers to the reduction of energy and material throughput necessary to address the existing biophysical constraints related to natural resources and the ecosystem's assimilative capacity. Moreover, degrowth challenges the pervasive nature of market-based relations and growth-oriented views in society, aiming to replace them with egalitarian abundance (ibid). Likewise, Schmelzer et al. (2022) define degrowth as a term used to criticize the hegemony of growth and as a proposal for a radical reorganization of society with a forceful reduction in the use of energy and resources. For degrowth is an assertive stance and a strong challenge to the growth imperative of capitalism, regarding a change of organization of society, as Schmelzer et al. stated above, degrowthers generally imagine and speak of a post-capitalist transformation. However, it is often not clear in the degrowth literature what kind of political regime is demanded by degrowth thinkers and what such a post-capitalist world looks like. In this regard, Michael Löwy, on the one hand, praises the degrowth idea with its contribution to ecology; on the other hand, he draws attention to inadequacies in degrowth literature concerning the alternative economic and social system degrowth imagines:

The degrowth reflection and movement that emerged in the last few decades have made a great contribution to a radical ecology by opposing the myth of an unlimited growth on a limited planet. However, degrowth in itself is not an alternative economic and social perspective: it does not define what kind of society will replace the present system. Some proponents of degrowth would ignore the issue of capitalism, focusing only on productivism and consumerism, defining the culprit as ‘The West’, ‘Enlightenment’, or ‘Prometheanism’. Others representing the left of the anti-growth movement clearly designate the capitalist system as responsible for the crisis and acknowledge the impossibility of a capitalist degrowth (Löwy 2023).

First of all, I do not think that it is possible to obtain a solution to the ecological crisis within capitalism, as capitalism is the ultimate cause of the crisis. Degrowth proponents do not clearly position themselves against the capitalist mode of production, which is the dominant economic and political system shaping our lives, and they do not openly name an alternative system to capitalism. Hence, I believe degrowth holds many uncertainties concerning the societal transformation and the political system it proposes. Işıkara (2023) points to this strategy of evasion in the degrowth literature:

However, when it comes to the mode of production, their arguments resemble the movement of a pendulum: Their thinking on capitalist growth inevitably comes down to a discussion of the mode of production. But every time they approach this limit, they either content themselves with an eclectic list of a few reforms that are irreconcilable with capitalist production, or they suggest turning away from the imagination of growth and appeal to moralistic approaches.

In my opinion, such a transformation that degrowth envisions cannot occur within the capitalist mode of production because capitalism inherently depends on perpetual growth and accumulation. Degrowth, on the contrary, calls for downscaling and deaccumulation; in this regard, degrowth is incompatible with capitalism. However, while many degrowth thinkers criticize capitalism and the growth imperative inherent to it, they do not explicitly discuss an overthrow of the capitalist mode of production. As widely discussed in Chapter 5, there is a problem with the realizability/applicability of degrowth’s suggestions unless the capitalist mode of production is abandoned. In other words, degrowth policies cannot be implemented without changing the capitalist mode of production. For instance, Kallis (2018, p. 122) argues that social justice and equity, along with a radical reorganization of production, distribution, and consumption envisioned by degrowth proponents, can only be achieved through democratic control over the production process. Likewise,

Schmelzer et al. (2022, p. 24) assert that ending the pursuit of growth does not point to recession but to a democratic process of transformation to a more just, sustainable society with less material and energy intensity. Hickel, in the same manner, mentions the importance of democratic control over finance and production and draws attention to the organization of these two around the objective of social and ecological well-being:

This requires that we distinguish between the socially necessary production that clearly needs to increase for social progress and the destructive and less necessary forms of production that urgently need to be scaled down. This is the revolutionary world-historical objective that faces our generation. As all of this should make clear, degrowth—the framework that has cracked open the imagination of scientists and activists over the past decade—is best understood as an element within a broader struggle for ecosocialism and anti-imperialism (Hickel, 2023a).

However, can it be argued that such democratic control over production is possible in capitalism? Capitalism heavily depends on the exchange values in the market. Conglomerates, corporations, and finance capital mainly determine what to produce and what to sell in line with their interests. Thus, since it is not possible to talk about democratic control over production under capitalism, the main point of concern should cluster around a way of overcoming capitalism. This is actually the point that degrowthers always get around. In order to actualize its policies, I believe that degrowth requires instruments of political power to control and repress the current hegemonic political and economic system, which is based on continuous growth through increased consumption and production. As far as I am concerned, such political suppression of today's growth-based economic and social system can only be achieved by seizing the state's political power. I argue that this process of seizing political power necessitates a class struggle against the ruling class.

Another matter of debate is degrowth thinkers' assertion of achieving social well-being for the masses by reducing the usage of energy and material throughput to bring the world economy back within planetary boundaries at the same time (Hickel, 2023a). Since such a reduction in energy and material use will inevitably yield a downscaling in production and consumption as well, I find this argument quite controversial. Similarly, Kallis (2018, p. 114) argues that there is no evidence that a contraction of the economy and its throughput will improve the well-being of the

masses. Besides, since degrowth is far from meeting the basic needs of billions of poor people and laborers of the world, I think degrowth cannot be seen as an umbrella under which different layers of society can gather. In other words, degrowth, with its current arguments, does not offer an opportunity for a collective environmental struggle. Driscoll (2024) implies in the same manner that “despite academic chatter, the degrowth movement is irrelevant to most people worldwide and fails in the public consciousness in both opinion and salience.” According to him, degrowth cannot provide empirically grounded, credible social and political solutions (ibid). As stated before, many degrowth proponents position themselves against the arguments of Marxism concerning the development of productive forces in the sense that this development harms nature. Instead, they focus on downsizing in production, which is called “politics of less” by Matthew Huber. I argue that this approach also weakens the possibility of endorsement of the degrowth idea by the masses. I do not think that degrowth can embrace the masses and mobilize them for the struggle against ecological destruction with this perspective.

To conclude, it is ambiguous what degrowth proponents offer to overcome the relations of capitalism. In his work, Kallis indicates the same problem, saying that since capital has grown by exploiting all possible founts of growth, “how and why would it accept limits to its main sources of free work: resources and energy?” (Kallis 2018, p. 105). He asks whether it is realistic to expect states to adopt policies that would threaten growth and whether it is possible to come into power with an agenda that would question growth (ibid., p. 137). According to him, the agenda should be to find how, or under what conditions, degrowth’s envisioned societal transformation may become possible (ibid., p. 137). Similarly, I argue that degrowth literature is far from articulating convincing arguments about these uncertainties. Hence, with all these uncertainties and problems, I think the idea of degrowth, as such, cannot be a viable solution to the ecological crisis.

## **6.2. A Possible Solution to the Impasse**

Let us begin with a provoking question from Jason Hickel: “If the dominant economic system actively destroys the biosphere and fails to meet most people’s basic needs at the same time, then what is the point?”

Before discussing possible solutions to environmental degradation and the possibility of bequeathing a livable planet for future generations, I believe the underlying causes of the current situation should be stated clearly. I contend that nature and the climate cannot be saved under capitalism; therefore, it is impossible to create an ecologically sustainable world under the hegemony of the capitalist mode of production. The interests of big corporations and monopolies are not compatible with environmentalist ideas like degrowth, which aim to limit the usage of energy and material throughput and reduce production and consumption in favor of social and ecological well-being. Capitalism's profit-oriented view, with its continuous exploitation of humans and nature, is the very basis of the system, and this formation can work more efficiently when nature is considered a free resource for capital to obtain surplus. Since environmental degradation is an outcome of the capitalist mode of production, the imagination of an alternative society in tune with the ecosystem should be based on the negation of capitalism as a mode of production. In other words, capitalism should be resolved first. Only then can we literally ponder on a sustainable world. Only then, a real analysis of viable solutions to ecological problems be meaningful. To say it again, I think it is not possible to overcome the environmental crisis without a radical shift—a socialist transformation—in the capitalist mode of production.

Huber (2022, p. 209) suggests seizing the means of production to save the planet, with a shift in attention from reducing individual consumption to politicizing the relations of production. In this regard, he emphasizes his hope for the era of social revolution before the planet is destroyed (*ibid*). According to Huber, the climate fight is not a cultural struggle against those who release the most carbon but a class struggle against those who actually produce fossil fuels (*ibid*). In this regard, Huber (*ibid.*, p. 128) offers a new language of climate politics that does not concentrate on less and calls for a climate politics of more, aligned with the material interests of the working class to win the masses. In other words, we need a new discourse to hold the attention of the masses. As Foster (2023b) mentions, there exists an opportunity to build a global movement in the arena:

Pessimism and optimism are irrelevant in this situation. It is about building a global movement based on the global working class and the “wretched of the earth” more

generally, and entering into the fight for a world of substantive equality and ecological sustainability. It is about the youth of today and future generations. You either choose a path of resigning humanity to its so-called fate, pointing at present to a planetary holocaust, or you resist.

I consider environmental problems to be directly related to the basic needs of the billions of poor laborers. In this regard, the working class, deprived of the means of production, should be taken as the appropriate agent to overcome the current environmental crisis and achieve the ultimate goals of degrowth, such as equity, justice, and societal well-being. I think the struggle of the working class for labor and the struggle of environmental activists to save nature should both position themselves against capitalism's continuous exploitation. Therefore, I see a concrete opportunity for a collective struggle of the climate movement together with all the exploited, dispossessed, suppressed, and marginalized people of the world against capitalism. Likewise, Kallis (2018, p. 140) draws attention to the affinity between the widespread "environmentalism of the poor and the indigenous" in the Global South and the movement for climate justice or degrowth in Europe. However, he doubts the reality of a possible generalized socio-political change in the direction of degrowth (ibid).

For sure, it will not be easy to get all these struggles together to cooperate for the same goals. In my opinion, the difficulty here is to create an awareness among people that they all have common interests and persuade them to join a united struggle. Kallis has a similar consideration about this issue: "The question is whether the movement of commoners or the dispossessed will see its common interest as conditions change, organizing to struggle politically and socially to produce a new mode of living, distributing, and enjoying" (Kallis 2018, p. 148).

In this sense, Hickel also pointed to the importance and need for an alliance between environmental and labor movements in his Instagram post on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024:

The climate and environmentalist movements need to get very serious about creating alliances with labor movements and working-class political formations. This means foregrounding social policies as core demands: universal public services, affordable housing, a job guarantee, living wages, and working-time reduction. Unite around these demands and mobilize around policies that will ensure well-being and economic justice for all.

I find degrowth's arguments for increasing the living standards of people through less production not comprehensible on their own. I argue that such a transformation can only be possible with a mode of production that is based on the needs of the people. Only a use-value-oriented production with central planning can overcome this problem. In other words, the main issue is to decide the purpose of production: a production for the basic needs of people or the sake of profit?

Işıkara (2023) argues that the primary function of production under socialism is to provide all citizens with use values to satisfy a universal standard of basic needs. This is actually what degrowth thinkers pursue: to achieve social well-being for all while maintaining a just distribution without exploiting nature. As far as I am concerned, collective planning, which we have seen in socialist practices so far, is necessary to satisfy such needs of the masses and to save nature. However, production in capitalism mainly depends on exchange values to expand the profit; capitalism, in the era of globalism, refrains from the discussion of central planning. Başkaya (2023, p. 6) states in the same manner that capitalism commoditizes all living bodies and asserts exchange value instead of use value. In this sense, Hickel says that “under capitalism, essential goods are either underproduced or commodified and priced out of the reach of working-class households, such as housing, health care, higher education, and so on” (Hickel, 2023a). Thus, only a socialist world system may enable the envisioned living conditions for the society that degrowth proponents imagine without damaging the ecosystem.

I contend that the suggestions and goals of degrowth can make sense only if we explicitly argue for a socialist model with confiscation of private property, distribution of large lands and enterprises to people, elimination of unnecessary and luxury production, transition to a centrally planned economy, etc. Only then can we move to a production organized for the needs of the people—the concept of use-value is important here—avoiding the production and consumption of unnecessary goods. This is clearly a transition to a proletarian government. Therefore, I believe that degrowth must be a part of a global anti-capitalist movement, and degrowth thinkers should call for a socialist world. In my opinion, without openly demanding socialism, degrowth promises nothing.

When we explicitly utter a united struggle of climate movements together with the working class and articulate the need for socialism, the class struggle may be offered as a key to environmentalism's impasse. Huber (2020) draws attention to the possible role of the working class in stopping environmental degradation:

It is workers' strategic location at the point of production which gives them tremendous power to disrupt capital's profits at the source. The most obvious form of planet-warming capitalist production is digging up fossil fuels and selling them for profit. Workers have power if they act collectively. They can halt capitalism's assault on the planet.

To conclude, despite the various problems that I have extensively discussed so far, I believe that degrowth encompasses valuable arguments concerning ecological problems. On the one hand, degrowth's goals of societal well-being, fair distribution, ending exploitation, direct democracy, localized production, ecologically and socially sustainable surplus, care, and decommodification of land and resources are very close to the socialist system that I argue for. On the other hand, although it holds many proximities, I think the degrowth idea cannot be totally in accord with Marxism because of the different perspectives it holds. At this point, I consider the critique of degrowth thinkers toward socialism regarding the development of productive forces problematic. Thus, I see it not possible for the degrowth proponents, with these approaches to socialist theory and practice, to act in concert with the socialist movements. However, I argue that the goals of degrowth that I have listed above can only be obtained through a struggle through the lens of socialism.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

“<...> And this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.”<sup>32</sup>

Andreucci and Engel-Di Mauro (2019, p. 184) mention that it is possible to imagine a society where humans can live “healthy, abundant, and meaningful lives without denigrating the natural world.” The idea of degrowth that I have analyzed in my thesis has been introduced to maintain the society that Andreucci and Engel-Di Mauro desire. The societal transformation that degrowth thinkers envision encompasses maintaining social well-being, justice, and equality for all, as well as respecting the limits of nature. The degrowth idea is a challenging confrontation with the growth imperative of capitalism; in this regard, degrowth comprises a post-capitalist imagination. My purpose in this study is to put forward a detailed analysis of the idea of degrowth, providing a frame for the political and/or ethical stance of degrowth proponents.

Degrowth, with its various interpretations, is a recently developed stance in the field of environmentalism and contains complexities and uncertainties. Together with the definitions and the historical development, I have tried to discuss the problems of degrowth and the criticism toward the degrowth idea, and I have provided my own interpretation of degrowth as well. Finally, I tried to explicate whether degrowth is a viable solution to the impasse in environmentalism and explore possible solutions to the current ecological breakdown.

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<sup>32</sup> Karl Marx: *Capital*, Vol.1

Scientific research shows us that we are facing an accelerated ecological crisis threatening life on Earth. Environmental degradation is felt on the planetary scale more deeply day by day. I should admit that I also have serious individual concerns about the well-being of the ecosystem and future generations. Thus, I consider any effort to stop environmental destruction and to solve the ecological crisis valuable. In this sense, as a Marxist dealing with environmental issues, I find the degrowth idea quite significant. However, as stated in the previous chapters, degrowth seems to be an insufficient strategy to solve the current environmental crisis due to its ambiguities and deficiencies. In my opinion, the most important problem of the degrowth arguments is the realizability/applicability of the idea under capitalism. In this sense, I contend that degrowth's suggestions cannot be implemented unless capitalism is overthrown by a socialist revolution.

Throughout my work, I have argued that ecological and social well-being are not compatible with the goal of perpetual growth inherent in capitalism. Therefore, if we want to stop environmental degradation and save nature, I think we should ponder ways of replacing the capitalist mode of production, which is dependent on the exploitation of both human labor and nature. Discussing the possibility of developing a Marxist ecological awareness in pursuit of climate justice, the opportunity for a collective climate struggle based on the power of the working class should also be considered. Stating that the capitalist mode of production is responsible for today's ecological and social crisis, I argue that the environmental movements should strive for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism together with the working class and the oppressed of the world in the pursuit of a livable planet. As Huber (2020) asserts, "the political theories and strategies that flow from Marx's core contradiction apply equally to ecological crisis: namely, the class struggle remains central."

Today, we face ecological and social problems due to the dominant economic system prevailing in our lives. Capitalism commodifies everything and plunders nature for the sake of profit. As a result, humans suffer from global ecological and social crises threatening life on the planet. Like in the field of environmentalism, liberalism suggests developing individualistic solutions to social and global problems in all areas. However, it is essential to generate collective solutions to these colossal

troubles, and a political struggle should be organized to obtain the intended results. From my point of view, people should unite and rebel against all the injustices, inequalities, and exploitation, which is very similar to Camus's absurdity<sup>33</sup>, in the world. Given that capitalism is leading us towards deadlock and we are living in a world of some sort of barbarism under capitalism, I think the only proper way is to stand up together against all forms of exploitation. For a better world of equality, justice, and freedom, bearing responsibility to hand the planet to future generations in livable conditions, collective political activism is a sine qua non. Keeping in mind that individual moral approaches by no means can solve such colossal global problems, ecology is a crucial field of this collective struggle.

As a last word, let me quote Chico Mendes once again:

“At first, I thought I was fighting to save rubber trees, then I thought I was fighting to save the Amazon rainforest. Now, I realize that I am fighting for humanity.”

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<sup>33</sup> Camus argues that only by rebellion, this absurdity can be overcome and replaced with justice, law, etc.

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## APPENDICES

### A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

#### BÖLÜM 1: GİRİŞ

Günümüzde, küresel ısınma ve iklim değişikliği ile birlikte çevresel kaygılar giderek artmaktadır. Yaşanan iklim krizinin gezegensel bir yok oluşa neden olabileceği tehlikesinin hissedilmesi, insan-doğa ilişkisinin daha fazla sorgulanır olmasını da beraberinde getirmiştir. Bir yandan ekolojik yıkımın nedenleri ve sorumluları üzerine kafa yorulurken, bir yandan da bu yıkımı durdurmaya yönelik çözüm önerileri gündeme gelmektedir. Bu bağlamda çevre mücadeleleri ve çevresel hareketler gelişmekte ve bu alanda yeni politik ve etik duruşlar akademik çevrelerde ve toplumsal alanda daha fazla tartışılmaktadır.

Çevresel konular, etik, politik, teknolojik, ekonomik vb. pek çok farklı alanla ilişkisi olan multidisipliner konulardır; bu nedenle, çevre alanında çalışmalar yapılırken bu çok yönlülüğün göz önünde bulundurulması gerekir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma kapsamında ele alınan 'küçülme' (degrowth) düşüncesi de farklı yönleriyle analiz edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu tezin amacı, küçülme fikrinin kapsamlı olarak (önerileri, hedefleri, güçlü ve zayıf yanları vb.) incelenerek, çevrecilik alanında etik ve politik bir duruşun belirlenmesidir. Aynı zamanda, içinde bulunduğumuz mevcut ekolojik krize bir çözüm olarak geliştirilen küçülme düşüncesine yönelik eleştiriler de tez kapsamında ele alınmakta olup, küçülmenin çevresel yıkıma karşı uygulanabilir bir düşünce/duruş olup olamayacağı konusu değerlendirilmektedir.

#### BÖLÜM 2: İNSAN-DOĞA İLİŞKİSİ VE FELSEFENİN BURADAKİ ROLÜ

Çevrecilik alanında ortaya atılan teorileri/fikirleri ele alırken, insan-doğa ilişkisi konusu önem arz etmektedir. Çevre felsefesinin özünü de, insan-doğa ilişkisi ve

doğaya etik yaklaşımlar oluşturmaktadır. İnsanın, insan dışı canlılarla ve bir bütün olarak doğa ile etkileşiminin nasıl olması gerektiği, bu bağlamda doğanın değerinin ne olduğu, doğaya ve gelecek kuşaklara karşı hangi sorumluluklar taşıdığımız gibi sorular çevre felsefesinde temel sorulardır. Örneğin Jamieson (2008, p. 6), felsefenin buradaki rolünü, içinde bulunduğumuz ekolojik yıkımla ilgili bir farkındalık yaratma ve bu bağlamda insan-doğa arasındaki ilişkiyi sorgulamak olarak açıklıyor. DesJardins'e (2013, p. 5) göre ise, çevre alanında çalışan felsefecilerin çevre ile ilgili meselelere politik, etik, metafizik ve epistemolojik kavramları içeren daha geniş ve radikal bir bakış geliştirmeleri gerekmektedir. Çevresel sorunların nedenlerinin aslında politik kararlar ve tercihler olduğunu düşündüğümüzde ise, çevre felsefesinin politik felsefe ve etik ile güçlü bağları olduğunu söyleyebiliriz.

Çevre alanındaki tartışmalarda temel noktanın, yaşamın/ekosistemin devamlılığını sağlayacak doğru yaklaşım ya da önerilerin ortaya konulması olduğunu düşünüyorum. Başka bir ifadeyle, ekolojik ve toplumsal iyi olma halini ve gelecek nesillere yaşanabilir bir dünya bırakma hedefini gerçekleştirebilecek politik ve etik duruşlar üzerine kafa yorulması gerekiyor. Zaten küçülme düşüncesi de, böyle bir amacı gerçekleştirmeye yönelik etik ve politik bir duruş olarak önerilmektedir.

Eşitsizlik, adaletsizlik ve ayrımcılıkların bu denli yoğun hissedildiği bir dünyada, bireyin etik bir yaşamı nasıl sürdürebileceği ya da bireysel yaklaşımların bu problemlere bir yanıt olup olamayacağı sorusu önemlidir. Bu bağlamda, doğa ile uyumlu bir yaşamın nasıl olabileceği sorusunun da bireysel etik alanının dışında görüyorum. Doğa katliam ve talanları, çevresel bozulmalar dikkate alındığında, tek başına etişin bu sorunları çözmekte yetersiz kalacağı bir gerçektir. Günümüz dünyasında, bu konular tamamen politik alanın belirleyiciliğindedir. Yine de, insan-doğa ilişkisini tanımlamak ve üretim sürecinde insanın doğayla etkileşimini tartışmak gerekmektedir. Bu bölümde, insan-doğa ilişkisini incelerken, sıklıkla Marksizmin bu konuyu nasıl ele aldığına değindim; çünkü bana göre Marksizm, ekolojik sorunların kaynağını gösterme, soruna dair çözüm önerileri geliştirme ve bu çözümü gerçekleştirecek özneleri ortaya koyma noktasında yol göstermektedir.

Marksizmde, doğa ve insan arasındaki sürekli etkileşime vurgu yapılmaktadır. Bu anlamda doğa da, tıpkı toplumlar gibi, dialektik bir değişim sürecine tabidir. Demirer

ve Özbudun (2024), bir yandan insan toplumunun doğayla ayrılmaz bir şekilde bağlantılı olduğunu, öte yandan insanların ise emek aracılığıyla doğaya müdahale ettiğini, onu dönüştürdüğünü söyler. İnsan toplumunun doğa üzerindeki etkisi üretim süreciyle şekillendiğinden, üretim ilişkilerindeki değişime bağlı olarak bu etkinin miktarı tarih boyunca farklılaşmıştır. Engels (1887), *Doğanın Diyalektiği* adlı eserinde, insanların doğaya ait olduğunu ve doğa üzerindeki hakimiyetimizin, onun yasalarını bilme ve uygulama konusunda diğer tüm varlıklara göre sahip olduğumuz avantajdan ibaret olduğunu belirtir. Benzer şekilde Aldo Leopold, insanları toprak topluluğunun (land community) sahipleri değil, sade üyeleri ve vatandaşları olarak tanımlar (Leopold 1949, p. 204). Ancak kapitalizm, insan ve doğa arasındaki bu birlikteliği ve etkileşimi yok etmek ve bu alanda bir ikilik (düalizm) yaratmak istemektedir. Hickel (2020a), dünyayı bu şekilde görmenin bir tür felsefî düalizm olduğunu ve bu fikirleri Platon'dan Descartes'a kadar uzun bir düşünürler silsilesinden miras aldığımızı belirtmektedir. Hickel'e göre, bu düalist felsefe günümüzün ekolojik krizinden sorumludur ve kapitalizmin argümanlarıyla doğrudan ilişkilidir. Bu anlamda, kapitalizmle birlikte insanın doğadan ayrıldığı iddiasıyla, doğa ve insan arasında bir tür dikotominin de ortaya çıktığı söylenebilir. Bu görüşe göre insan doğaya hükmeden bir varlıktır ve doğayla çatışma halindedir. Ben bu yaklaşımın—insanın doğa üzerindeki hakimiyetinin güçlü bir şekilde ileri sürülmesinin—kapitalist üretim biçiminde doğal kaynakların kapitalist tekellerin çıkarları için sömürülmesinin meşrulaştırılması çabasından kaynaklandığını düşünüyorum.

### BÖLÜM 3: İKLİM DEĞİŞİKLİĞİ VE GÜNÜMÜZ ÇEVRECİLİĞİNDEKİ ÇIKMAZ

İklim değişikliğinin yarattığı küresel risk ve buna bağlı olarak artan çevresel farkındalık göz önünde bulundurarak, bu bölümde günümüz çevreciliğini ele almayı ve ekoloji mücadelesinde gördüğüm sorunları tartışmayı amaçladım. Bu bölümde iki temel konu üzerinde durulmuştur: ilk olarak bilimsel bir olgu olarak iklim değişikliği kavramı incelenmiş, daha sonra ise çevresel yıkımın sebepleri ve sorumluları tartışılmıştır. Buradaki amaçlarımdan biri de, akademide ve iklim hareketlerinde

egemen olan liberal bakış açısının kitleleri yanlış yönlendirmesine dikkat çekmek ve günümüz çevreciliğindeki çıkmazın nedenlerini tartışmaktır.

Löwy (2023) günümüzün ekolojik krizini yirmi birinci yüzyılın en önemli sosyal ve politik sorunu olarak tanımlamakta ve bu krizin önümüzdeki on yıllarda gezegenin ve insanlığın geleceğini belirleyeceğini ifade etmektedir. Benzer şekilde Kallis (2018, s. 100), iklim değişikliğinin yalnızca diğer türleri ve biyoçeşitliliği değil, aynı zamanda insanların yaşam koşullarını da tehdit ettiğini savunmaktadır. Klitgaard ise (2023), kapitalizmin yol açtığı küresel bir ekolojik ve sosyal kriz nedeniyle varoluşsal bir tehditle karşı karşıya olduğumuzu iddia ediyor. Klitgaard'a göre (a.g.e.), doğanın sınırlarının çoğunu çoktan aşmış durumdayız ve sorunu çözmek için fazla zamanımız kalmadı.

Bilim, bugün karşı karşıya olduğumuz küresel iklim değişikliğinin insan kaynaklı (antropogenic) olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, iklim değişikliğine neden olan doğrudan insan etkisidir; yaşadığımız çevresel sorunlar, insan toplumunun doğaya müdahalesinin sonuçlarıdır. Ancak, içinde bulunduğumuz mevcut çevresel yıkım için insanlığı bir bütün olarak suçlamak adil midir? Ya da tüm insanların bu sorundan aynı düzeyde etkilendiğini söyleyebilir miyiz? Bu bağlamda, çevre sorunlarının nedeninin insanlığın doğaya karşı görevlerini yerine getirmemesi olduğunu iddia edebilir miyiz? Benim düşünceme göre, yıkımın asıl sorumlularını görmezden gelerek iklim değişikliğinin hikayesini bu şekilde anlatmak eksik olacaktır.

Çevrecilik alanında liberal yaklaşımlar tarafından, insanların doğaya müdahaleleri ile bugünkü ekolojik felaket durumuna neden olduğu yaygın olarak ifade edilmektedir. Yani yaşanan sorunların kaynağı bir bütün olarak insanlıktır. Huber, bu görüşün bireylere içsel bir suçluluk duygusu aşıladığını ve doğaya verilen zarardan dolayı onları suçladığını savunmaktadır (2022, s. 104). Her ne kadar bazı kişi veya grupların doğayı tahrip eden bilinçli ve kasıtlı eylemleriyle çevresel problemlerde payı olduğunu düşünüyor olsam da, tüm insanlara ortak bir suçluluk yükleyen bu yaklaşımların kapitalist sistemin çevresel bozulmadaki rolünü gizlemeyi amaçladığını savunuyorum. Dahası, bence bu çabalar, emeğin ve doğanın sürekli

sömürüsüne dayanan bu egemen sistem için insanlardan rıza üretmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, mevcut çevresel yıkım kapitalist üretim tarzının işleyişiyle bağlantılı olduğundan, kapitalizmin bu krizdeki rolü açıkça ifade edilmelidir.

Özellikle politik ekoloji yazınında, ekolojik sorunların nedeninin kapitalist üretim biçimi olduğu genel bir kabuldür. Löwy'ye (2023) göre suçlu, sonsuz genişleme, birikim, üreticilik ve kâr arayışı saplantısı gibi saçma ve irrasyonel bir mantığı olan kapitalist sistemdir. Aksu (2023) da aynı şekilde, ekolojik sorunların ezelden beri var olmadığını, insanoğlunun üretim sisteminin tarihsel gelişiminin belirli bir döneminde sahneye çıktığını savunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Aksu'ya (a.g.e.) göre, ne insanların doğa üzerindeki tüm eylemleri doğaya zararlı olarak değerlendirilebilir ne de mevcut ekolojik yıkımdan tüm insanlar sorumlu tutulabilir.

Meta üretimine ve büyük ölçüde kullanım değeri yerine değişim değerine dayanan kapitalist üretim tarzında, üretimin kontrolü özel mülkiyete aittir; mal ve hizmetler piyasada fiyatlandırılır ve satın alınır. Üretim, piyasada değişim ve dolaşım için gerçekleştirilir ve bundan net bir kar geliri elde edilmesi amaçlanır. Üretim araçlarının sahipleri, kârlarını artı değer sömürsünden elde eder. Bu bağlamda Marx, kapitalist dolaşımın genel formülünü, paranın metalara ve metaların tekrar paraya dönüştüğü M-C-M (para-meta-para) olarak tanımlar (Marx 1887, s. 104). Marx, M-C-M döngüsünün başlıca güdüsünün ve amacının değişim-değeri olduğunu belirtir (a.g.e., s. 106). Kapitalizmin emeği sömürmesi ve doğayı yağmalaması birbirinden ayrı meseleler değildir; her ikisi de meta üretimine ve artı değere el koymaya dayanan üretim tarzıyla ilişkilidir. Marx, kapitalist üretim tarzının oluşumunda doğanın yalnızca bir nesne, kâr ve sermaye birikimi uğruna bir üretim aracı olarak görüldüğüne işaret eder. Dolayısıyla, kapitalizmde doğa artık içsel/özel bir güç olarak görülmemektedir.

Bu bölümde incelenen konulardan birisi de, mevcut çevre mücadeleleri ve onlara yönelik eleştirilerdir. Son dönemde özellikle Batı'da çevre mücadeleleri/iklim aktivizmi büyümüş ve mücadele yöntemleri çeşitlenmiştir. Bu hareketlerin, kapitalizmi çevresel sorunların ana kaynağı olarak görmeleri, iklim krizine karşı gençliği harekete geçirmeleri ve toplumsal aktivizmi önermeleri açısından değerli

olduklarını düşünüyorum. Öte yandan, *Letzte Generation*, *Just Stop Oil*, *Fridays For Future* örneklerinde olduğu gibi, yeni gelişen bu hareketlerin, kaynak kullanımını azaltmak ve fosil yakıtlardan çıkış önerileri gibi noktalarda küçülme düşüncesi ile de ortak paydalarının olduğu kanaatindeyim. Ancak, aktivistlerin tüm kararlılıklarına ve mücadele araçlarının çeşitliliğine rağmen, bu hareketler kitlelerle buluşmaktan uzaktır. Bu bağlamda Huber, günümüzün ekolojik sorunlarının, yoksulların temel ihtiyaçlarıyla olan ilgisinin altını çizmektedir. Huber'e göre, iklim hareketinin argümanları, temel ihtiyaçlara ulaşmakta zorlanan bu kesimlerle buluşmamaktadır ve onların çıkarları doğrultusunda yeterli bir strateji sunmamaktadır (Huber 2022, p. 102). Gerçekten de mevcut çevre mücadelelerine baktığımızda, bu hareketlerin esas olarak entelektüeller, akademisyenler ve beyaz yakalılarından oluşan kentli orta sınıflara dayandığını söyleyebiliriz. Sonuç olarak bu hareketler, dünya genelinde milyarlarca emekçiyi ikna etmekten ve çevresel bozulmayı durdurmak için kitlelerin birleşik iklim mücadelesini başarmaktan oldukça uzaktırlar.

Kapitalizmi ekolojik problemlerin kaynağı olarak gören bu anlayışların yanı sıra, çevresel bozulmanın sorumluluğunu bireylere yükleyen, bireysel tüketime ve karbon ayak izi analizine odaklanan liberal yaklaşımların çevrecilikte hala etkin olduğunu söyleyebiliriz. Liberal zihinlerin bireyci bakış açısının çevrecilik alanındaki bu yansımalarının, kitleleri bilinçli olarak yanlış yönlendirdiğini savunuyorum. Bana göre, aşırı tüketimin doğal kaynaklara verilen zararı artırdığı bir gerçektir; ancak iklim değişikliğinin itici gücü olarak tüketim analizine bağlı kalmak, sorunun yanlış değerlendirilmesidir.

#### BÖLÜM 4: KÜÇÜLME (DEGROWTH) NEDİR?

Son yıllarda küçülme düşüncesi çevrecilik alanında giderek popülerlik kazanmış ve bu alandaki akademisyenler, çevreciler ve sivil toplumu bir araya getirmiştir. Esasında küçülme, çok yönlü bir fikirdir ve bünyesinde birçok farklı yaklaşımı barındırmaktadır. Tez çalışmamın temeli olarak nitelendirdiğim bu bölümde, çevrecilik alanında politik ve etik bir duruş olarak küçülmeyi pek çok farklı akademisyen ve araştırmacının bakış açılarını da yansıtarak ele almaya ve küçülmenin tarihsel gelişimini incelemeye çalıştım.

Küçülme, mevcut ekolojik yıkımı durdurma hedefiyle ortaya çıkmış bir bakış açısıdır. Temel olarak, topluma egemen olan büyüme fikrine ve büyüme odaklı üretim anlayışına bir karşı duruş olmakla birlikte, ekonomik bir kavramın çok ötesindedir. Küçülme yazınında, küçülmenin ne olduğuna, neleri hayata geçirmek istediğine dair birbirinden farklı iddialar/görüşler olsa da, genel olarak küçülme düşüncesi savunucularının toplumsal bir dönüşüm üzerine yoğunlaştıkları görülmektedir. Daha çok post-kapitalist bir toplum tahayyülü diyebileceğimiz bu yeni modelde, enerji ve hammadde kullanımında ölçek küçülmesine gidilerek, doğal çevre ile uyumlu bir yaşam sürdürülmesi hedeflenmektedir. Küçülme düşünürlerine göre, bu şekildeki bir ölçek küçülmesi, üretim ve tüketimde de bir azalmaya gidilerek çevresel yıkımın etkilerini azaltacaktır. Bu bölümde küçülmenin ne olduğu tartışılırken, Kallis, Hickel, Işıkara, Akbulut, Schmelzer vd. gibi küçülme alanında çalışan pek çok araştırmacının görüşlerine yer verilmiştir. Örneğin, küçülme üzerine çalışan uluslararası bir düşünce kuruluşu olan Research and Degrowth'un (2024) tanımlamasına göre küçülme, insan refahını artıran, toplumsal eşitliği geliştiren, gezegendeki ekolojik koşullarla uyumlu, sürdürülebilirlik esaslı bir üretim ve tüketim ölçөгüdür. Akbulut'a (2021, s. 98) göre ise küçülme, toplum, ekonomi ve doğayı eklemlenmenin alternatif yollarını hayal etme çabasındaki kavramsal bir çerçevedir. Kallis (2018, s. 9), en genel anlamda küçülmeyi, çevresel sürdürülebilirlikle uyumlu olacak şekilde enerji ve kaynak üretiminin azaltılması olarak açıklamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, politik ve etik bir duruş olarak küçülme, yalnızca maddi ölçek küçültmeye ilişkin ekonomik meselelerle ilgili değildir; küçülme düşüncesi aynı zamanda toplumsal formasyona da güçlü bir vurgu yapmaktadır. Işıkara, küçülme hareketinin, üreticiliği ve sonsuz büyüme arayışını eleştirerek, mevcut yaşam biçiminin tersine çevrilmesi ve toplumun büyüme arayışından kurtularak küçülme yoluyla canlılığa kavuşması gerektiğini savunduğunu belirtmektedir (Işıkara 2020, s. 111).

Yukarıda belirtildiği üzere küçülme düşüncesi, kapitalizmin büyüme zorunluluğuna karşı çıkan bir duruştur ve bu anlamda anti-kapitalist bir bakış taşıdığı söylenebilir. Dolayısıyla küçülme düşüncesini incelemeye başlamadan önce, büyümenin—daha doğru bir ifadeyle kapitalist büyümenin—ne olduğunu incelemeye çalıştım. Bu anlamda büyümenin kapitalist üretim biçimi ile ilişkisini ele aldım ve kapitalizmin doğası gereği büyüme mecburiyetinde olan bir sistem olduğunu göstermeye çalıştım.

Kapitalist üretim biçimine içkin olan büyüme, toplumsal gelişim ya da kalkınma olarak ele alınamaz; kapitalizmde büyüme aslında sermaye birikimidir ve üretim sürecinde artı değere el konulması ile ilgilidir. Kapitalist üretim biçimi kar odaklıdır ve kullanım değeri yerine değişim değerine odaklanır. Sermayenin çıkarları esas alınan üretim sürecinde, emeğin sömürsü ve doğanın yağmalanması iç içe geçmiştir. Yani, kapitalizm koşulları altında çevresel yıkım kaçınılmazdır. Küçülme düşüncesi kapitalist büyüme anlayışına karşı yeni bir paradigma ortaya koymayı amaçladığından, küçülmenin kapitalizm karşıtı bir model olduğu da söylenebilir. Ancak, küçülme düşünürlerinin kapitalizmi bir üretim biçimi olarak açık bir şekilde karşılarına almadıklarını ve kapitalizme karşı alternatif bir sistemi de net olarak önermediklerini savunuyorum. Bence, küçülme savunucuları bu noktada kaçamak bir tutum almaktadır. Küçülme, kapitalizmi eleştirirken, yerine nasıl bir üretim modeli önerdiği belirsizdir. Küçülme fikrine yönelik eleştirilerden biri olan bu noktayı, tezimin ilerleyen bölümlerinde daha geniş olarak ortaya koymaya çalıştım.

Bu bölümde ayrıca, içinde bulunduğumuz ekolojik krize bir çözüm olarak önerilen küçülme düşüncesinin nihai hedefleri ile somut önerilerini inceledim. Bu bağlamda, küçülme savunucularının mevcut çevresel yıkım karşısında politik duruşlarının ne olduğunu da ortaya koymak istedim. Küçülme, genel olarak kapitalist büyüme fikrine karşı bir düşünce olduğundan, kapitalizmin aşırı üretim ve tüketime dayalı anlayışına da karşıdır. Dolayısıyla, hammadde, enerji kullanımı ve kaynak kullanımını azaltacak şekilde, daha küçük ölçekli, lokal, otonom yapılar üzerinden üretim yapılmasını savunur. Bunun yanında küçülme düşünürleri, fosil yakıtlarından çıkış, yenilenebilir enerji kaynaklarından faydalanma, demokratik ve adil bir bölüşüm ve tüm çalışanlar için yeterli temel bir ücret gibi somut öneriler sunmaktadırlar. Çevresel yıkımın önüne geçebilmek ve doğa ile uyumlu bir yaşam sürebilmek adına ise, bireysel tüketimin de azaltılması ve buna yönelik yaşam alışkanlıklarında bir dönüşümün gerçekleştirilmesi gerekmektedir. Bu da küçülmenin bireysel alandaki önerilerindedir. Elbette bu önerilerin hangi koşullar altında hayata geçirilebileceği belirsizdir. Bana göre, sömürü ve büyüme odaklı kapitalist sistem aşılmadan küçülmeçilerin savundukları bir modele geçilmesi mümkün değildir; çünkü kapitalizm doğası gereği her zaman daha fazla kaynak kullanmak istemektedir.

## BÖLÜM 5: KÜÇÜLME İLE İLGİLİ SORUNLAR VE KÜÇÜLMENİN SOSYALİST BİR PERSPEKTİFTEN ELEŞTİRİSİ

Bu bölümde, küçülme düşüncesi ile ilgili sorunlu gördüğüm konuları ele almaya çalıştım. Bunu yaparken de, ekoloji alanında çalışmalar yürüten bazı Marksist düşünürlerin eleştirilerinden yararlandım. Bu bölümde küçülme düşüncesine dönük yapıcı eleştiriler getirildi, çünkü her ne kadar küçülmecilerin savduklarının mevcut koşullarda uygulanabilirliği olmadığını düşünsem de, bir bütün olarak küçülme fikrini ve önerilerini değerli buluyorum. Yine bu bölümde incelenen bir diğer başlık, küçülme düşüncesi ile sosyalizmin argümanları arasındaki benzerlikler ve farklılıklar oldu. Bölüm sonunda ise küçülme alanındaki bazı önemli akademisyen ve yazarların (Kallis, Hickel, Huber, Işıkkara) düşüncelerinin karşılaştırmasını yapmaya çalıştım.

Bölümün ana konusu, küçülme düşüncesindeki sorunlar ve küçülmeye yönelik eleştirilerdir. Bu kapsamda ilk olarak küçülme düşüncesindeki belirsizlikleri ele aldım. Küçülmenin daha çok etik mi yoksa politik mi bir duruş olduğu bunların başında gelmektedir. Benim düşünceme göre küçülme, hem politik hem de etik bir duruştur ve aslında bu ikisini birbirinden ayırmak hata olacaktır. Yine küçülmenin özünde bir azla yetinme modeli olup olmadığı konusunun ve üretim ve kaynak kullanımındaki ölçek küçültmenin, özellikle yoksul kitlelerce arzulanıp arzulanmayacağı tartışmalı olduğunu düşünüyorum. Örneğin bana göre, üretim ve buna bağlı olarak tüketimdeki bir azalma ile pek çok yoksullukla boğuşan kesimlerin sosyal ve ekolojik problemlerine çözüm olma iddiası, akla uygun görünmemektedir. Son olarak, küçülme düşüncesinin dünya üzerindeki sosyal ve ekonomik farklılıkları ve buna bağlı güç ilişkilerini yeterince değerlendirmediyini savunuyorum. Bu anlamda küçülmecilerin önerilerinin, özellikle Küresel Güney'in yoksul ülkeleri için savunulabilir olmadığını iddia ediyorum.

Sorunlu gördüğüm diğer bir konu ise küçülme düşüncesindeki yöntem sorununa ilişkindir. Bu bir anlamda, amaç-araç diyalektiğine dair bir problemdir. Küçülme fikrinin nihai hedefinin toplumsal ve ekolojik bir iyi durum elde etme olduğu söylenebilir. Hızlanan ekolojik çöküş nedeniyle gezegensel bir yok oluş tehdidinin hissedildiği bir ortamda, bu nihai hedef, dünyanın ve hayatın sürdürülebilirliği ve

gelecek nesillere yaşanabilir bir dünya miras bırakmak olarak da tanımlanabilir. Kallis (2018, s. 118) küçülme toplumunda ekonominin kendi başına bir amaç değil, daha üstün bir amaca giden bir araç olduğunu iddia etmektedir ki; Kallis'e göre bu amaç biyolojik ihtiyaçlarımızın tatmini ve yaşama dair bir anlam arayışımız olarak ifade edilebilir.

Peki bu hedeflere ulaşmak için hangi araçlar kullanılacaktır? Küçülme savunucularının önerdiği, daha az madde kullanımına dayalı küçük ölçekli ve doğa ile uyumlu bu yeni toplumsal ve ekonomik modele nasıl geçilecektir? Küçülme politikalarının hayata geçirilmesi için kullanılması gereken araçlar nelerdir ve bu araçlar nihai amaca uygun mudur? Küçülmecilerin bu sorulara yeterince açık cevaplar veremediklerine düşünüyorum. Bu bağlamda, küçülme fikrinin önerilerinin gerçekleştirilmesi koşulları, küçülme yazınında tam olarak ortaya konulmamaktadır.

Küçülme düşüncesine bir diğer önemli eleştiri ise küçülmedeki özneye ilişkindir. Başka bir ifadeyle, küçülme politikalarını hayata geçirecek, bunun için mücadele edecek özne kimdir ya da nedir? İçinde bulunduğumuz ekolojik krizin, kapitalizmin doğa ve insan sömürüsü nedeniyle ortaya çıktığını savunduğum için, çözüm olarak da kapitalist üretim biçiminin değişmesi gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Bu anlamda öncelikli olan, kapitalizmin nasıl aşılabileceğinin ve kapitalizmi aşma mücadelesinin öznesinin ne olması gerektiğinin ortaya konulmasıdır. Kapitalizmin kar odaklı üretim biçiminde, üretim araçlarının sahibi olmayan ve geçinmek için emeğini satmak zorunda olanlar, kapitalizm karşıtı mücadelenin de öznesidir. Öte yandan, ekolojik krizin getirdiği kuraklık, aşırı yağışlar ve buna bağlı olarak sağlıklı gıdaya ve temiz suya erişim sorunu gibi problemler, sermaye tarafından emeği sömürülen ve mülksüz bırakılan yoksul kesimleri daha fazla etkilemektedir. Meseleyi bu şekilde ortaya koyduğumuzda, çevre mücadelelerinin öznesinin de işçi sınıfı ve bir bütün olarak ezilenler olduğunu savunuyorum. Burada önerilen geleneksel anlamda endüstriyel bir işçi sınıfı değil; temel ihtiyaçlarına erişim sorunu bulunan kent ve kırsal yoksulları, gelecek kaygısı taşıyan gençlik, sistemin baskısına ve sömürüsüne maruz kalan kadınlar ve göçmenler ve ezilenlerden oluşan daha genel bir tanımlamaya işaret etmektedir. Gezegenel yıkımı durdurmak ve gelecek nesillere yaşanabilir bir dünya bırakabilmek için kapitalizme karşı verilecek bu mücadelede, anti-kolonyal

mücadeleler ile son dönemde giderek artan hafriyatçılık (extractivism) projelerine karşı toprağına ve yaşam alanlarına sahip çıkanların yereldeki direnişleri de bütünü parçaları olmalıdır. Ancak küçülme yazınında, küçülmenin önerdiği sosyal ve toplumsal dönüşümün öznesi belirsizdir.

Daha önce ifade edildiğı üzere, küçülme düşüncesinin önerileri ve hedeflerini değerli buluyorum. Yaşadığımız ekolojik problemlerin kaynağını kapitalist üretim biçimi olarak görüyorum ve çözüm olarak da insanların temel ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak maksatlı planlı bir ekonomiye/üretime dayanan sosyalist bir modeli savunuyorum. Bana göre küçülme düşüncesi ile sosyalizm arasında önemli benzerlikler bulunmaktadır. Bu anlamda bazı küçülme savunucuları da kendilerini sosyalist/ekososyalist olarak tanımlamaktadır. Küçülme fikrindeki adil bir bölüşüm, herkese temel ücret, daha fazla boş zaman, doğayla uyumlu ve daha az tüketime dayanan bir yaşam önerileri, sosyalizmin pratikleri ile uyumludur. Ancak küçülme fikrine egemen olan tezlerde, sosyalizmin (Marx'ın) üretici güçlerin gelişmesine yaptığı vurgu eleştirilmektedir. Hatta pek çok küçülme savunucusu, sosyalizmi üretimcilikle ve doğaya verilen zararı görmezden gelmekle suçlamaktadır. Bu anlamda bana göre küçülme düşüncesi, sosyalizmin tezleriyle uyumlu değildir.

## BÖLÜM 6: KÜÇÜLME MEVCUT EKOLOJİK KRİZE UYGUN BİR ÇÖZÜM MÜDÜR?

Küçülme düşüncesini pek çok yönden ele aldıktan sonra, bu bölümde ise bir tartışma yürütmeye çalıştım. Küçülmeye dair yapmış olduğum kendi değerlendirmelerim sonucunda, küçülmenin mevcut çevresel sorunlara bir çözüm olup olamayacağını ele aldım. Ekolojik sorunlara kafa yoran ve doğaya verilen zarardan endişe duyan insanlar için, küçülme düşüncesinin önemli argümanlar ortaya koyduğunu düşünüyorum. Yine de, içinde barındırdığı belirsizlikler ve yetersizlikler nedeniyle, küçülmenin bu haliyle, içinde bulunduğumuz çevresel yıkıma bir çözüm olamayacağını savunuyorum.

Her şeyden önce, küçülme stratejisinin, kapitalist üretim biçimi değiştirilmeden hayata geçirilmesinin mümkün olmadığını iddia ediyorum. Öte yandan, küçülmenin

ortaya koyduđu ve bir anlamda insanlara daha azla yetinmeyi önerdiđi toplumsal ve ekonomik modelin, yoksulluk ve yoksunlukla bođuşan milyarlarca insanın bulunduđu bir dünyada, kitlelerce benimseneceđini düşünmüyorum. Küçülme düşüncesi her ne kadar kapitalizmi eleştiren bir yerde konumlansa ve post-kapitalist bir toplum hayali kursa da, kapitalizmin ana unsurlarının yerine neyi koyacağını açıkça ortaya koymuyor. Bunun yanı sıra, büyüme karşıtı bir strateji önerildiğinde, kapitalist devlet aygıtının buna direneceđi göz ardı ediliyor. Dolayısıyla, kapitalizmi aşma iddiasının güçlü ve somut argümanlarla ortaya konulması gerekiyor. Bu anlamda, doğayı yok eden ve sürdürülemez olan kapitalizmin egemenliğine dokunmayan herhangi bir modelin, ekolojik krize çözüm olması mümkün görünmüyor.

Işıkara (2023), sosyalizmde üretimin birincil işlevinin, tüm insanlar için evrensel bir temel ihtiyaç standardını karşılayacak kullanım değerleri sağlamak olduğunu savunmaktadır. Aslında küçülme düşünürlerinin peşinde olduđu şey de budur: doğayı sömürmeden adil bir bölüşüm sağlamak ve herkes için sosyal refaha/iyi duruma ulaşmak. Bu anlamda, küçülmenin öneri ve hedeflerinin ancak sosyalist bir modeli açıkça savunursak anlamlı olabileceđini iddia ediyorum. Sadece bu şekilde insanların ihtiyaçları için organize edilmiş demokratik bir üretime geçebiliriz. Bu nedenle, küçülme düşüncesinin küresel bir anti-kapitalist hareketin parçası olması gerektiğine ve küçülme savunucularının açıkça sosyalist bir dünya çağrısında bulunması gerektiğine inanıyorum.

## BÖLÜM 7: SONUÇ

Andreucci ve Engel-Di Mauro (2019, s. 184), insanların doğaya zarar vermeden, sağlıklı, üretken ve anlamlı hayatlar yaşayabileceđi bir toplum hayal etmenin mümkün olduğunu belirtmektedir. Tezimde incelediğim küçülme düşüncesi de, böyle bir toplum özlemini ortaya koymaktadır. Küçülme düşüncesinde öngörülen toplumsal dönüşüm, herkes için sosyal refah, adalet ve eşitliğin korunmasının yanı sıra doğanın sınırlarına saygı gösterilmesi argümanları önemlidir. Küçülme fikrinin temelini oluşturan büyüme toplumundan çıkış fikri, kapitalizmin büyüme zorunluluđuyla bir yüzleşmedir; bu bağlamda, büyümenin azaltılması fikri, post-

kapitalist bir tahayyülü içermektedir. Dolayısıyla, küçülme fikri özü itibariyle kapitalizmle çelişmektedir. Bu çalışmadaki amacım, küçülme fikrinin ayrıntılı bir analizini ortaya koymak ve küçülme taraftarlarının siyasi ve/veya etik duruşları için bir çerçeve sağlamaktır.

Bugün bilimsel araştırmalar bize, Dünya üzerindeki yaşamı tehdit eden bir ekolojik krizle karşı karşıya olduğumuzu gösteriyor. Çevresel bozulma gezegen ölçeğinde her geçen gün daha derinden hissediliyor. Bu bağlamda, ekosistemin ve gelecek nesillerin devamlılığı konusunda ciddi bireysel kaygılarım olduğunu da itiraf etmeliyim. Bu nedenle, çevresel yıkımı durdurmaya ve ekolojik krizi çözmeye yönelik her türlü çabayı değerli buluyorum. Ancak, önceki bölümlerde de belirtildiği gibi, küçülme düşüncesi, belirsizlikleri ve eksiklikleri nedeniyle mevcut çevresel krizi çözmek için yetersiz bir strateji gibi görünmektedir. Bana göre küçülme argümanlarının en önemli sorunu, bu fikrin kapitalizm egemenliği altında gerçekleştirilebilirliği/uygulanabilirliğidir. Bu anlamda, kapitalizm sosyalist bir devrimle yıkılmadıkça, küçülme düşünürlerinin önerilerinin hayata geçirilemeyeceğini iddia ediyorum.

Bugün, egemen sistem nedeniyle gezegendeki yaşamı tehdit eden küresel ölçekte ekolojik ve sosyal sorunlarla karşı karşıyayız. Kapitalizm her şeyi metalaştırıyor ve kâr uğruna doğayı talan ediyor. Kapitalizmin bizi çıkmaza sürüklediği ve kapitalizm altında bir tür barbarlığın hüküm sürdüğü bir dünyada yaşadığımız göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, tek doğru yolun her türlü sömürüye karşı birlikte mücadele etmek olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bu noktada, eşitlik, adalet ve özgürlüğün egemen olduğu bir dünya için, gezegeni gelecek nesillere yaşanabilir koşullarda devretme sorumluluğuyla, kolektif politik eylem olmazsa olmazdır. Bireysel yaklaşımların böylesine devasa küresel sorunları hiçbir şekilde çözemeyeceğini akılda tutarak, ekoloji mücadelesinin de bu kolektif mücadelenin önemli bir alanı olduğunu savunuyorum.

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