

16.07.2018

# In support of Degrowth

Contributions of  
ecofeminism and feminist  
groups supporting  
degrowth

---

Teresa Bicknell  
BSc Thesis  
931013065060  
RSO Jessica Duncan

---



WAGENINGEN  
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

## **Abstract**

Degrowth argues that environmental degradation is caused by exploitative growth processes and unsustainable consumption patterns (Bendix 2017). This thesis analyses how ecofeminism and feminist social movements have positioned themselves within the degrowth movement. As theories of ecofeminism and degrowth share strong synergies, both share the aim of environmental protection. Further at the degrowth conference in Leipzig, 2014, two feminist social movements aligned themselves to degrowth.

Looking at the relationship and contributions, the theory of ecofeminism and these two feminist groups in practice, have made towards degrowth, we can see how they can support the degrowth movement. On the one hand, both theory and practice, criticize degrowth on issues such as female representation and view of romanticizing the past, enabling degrowth to confront some of their weak points. On the other hand, both offer suggestions for improvement as well as how degrowth should proceed in order to increase their wider appeal. Here fore, ecofeminism stresses that care and protection should be given to reproductive processes of both nature and women. Both feminist groups stress that care should be prioritized in a degrowth vision, to ensure human needs are met. I argue that combining the contributions of the theory and the practice of ecofeminism will improve degrowth's wider appeal, include a gendered perspective and help tackle the problems of unsustainable growth, overconsumption and environmental degradation, which degrowth tries to achieve.

**Contents**

- Abstract ..... 1
- Contents ..... 2
- 1. Introduction ..... 3
  - 1.1 Research question ..... 4
  - 1.2 Methodology ..... 4
- 2. Contributions of ecofeminism on degrowth ..... 5
  - 2.1 Conceptual framework ..... 5
    - 2.1.1 Degrowth ..... 5
    - 2.1.2 Ecofeminism ..... 8
  - 2.2 Synergies between ecofeminism and degrowth ..... 10
  - 2.3 Ecofeminist critique on degrowth ..... 13
- 3. Feminist movements relationship with degrowth ..... 14
  - 3.1 Introduction of Trouble everyday collective and Care Revolution ..... 14
  - 3.2 Their contributions to degrowth ..... 17
  - 3.3 Divergence between Trouble Everyday Collective and Care Revolution ..... 20
- 4. Comparison and bridging the gap between theory and practice ..... 21
  - 4.1 Problems addressed by ecofeminist theory and related feminist groups ..... 21
  - 4.2 Problems less dwelt on ..... 22
  - 4.3 Enriching degrowth by incorporating both practice and theory ..... 24
- 5. Discussion ..... 26
- 6. Conclusion ..... 27
  - 6.1 Limits and suggestion for further research ..... 28
- 7. Bibliography ..... 29

## 1. Introduction

In consumer societies, such as Germany, consumption patterns have reached an unsustainable level, affecting ecological degradation and advancing the impacts of climate change (Redclift 1996; Schubert and Stoffrein 2016). Since the increase in material wealth and living standards in Germany after 1950s, many citizens now enjoy more leisure time and consumption possibilities. Herein, lies the basis of a consumer society (Haupt and Torp 2009), where overconsumption usually occurs. For instance, in Germany domestic waste accumulation drastically increased, with more goods/products being consumed than needed (Mies and Shiva 1993). It is crucial to acknowledge the impact overconsumption has on environmental problems, as it directly influences the exploitation of resources at unsustainable rates (Princen 1999). With consumer societies consuming at unsustainable levels which prevent the planet of regenerating its natural resources, leading to the planetary boundaries being exasperated. (Princen 1999, Rockstrom et al. 2009).

Two theories, that address these fears of ecological degradation and acknowledge the problem that consumerism has on exasperating those, are degrowth and ecofeminism. Degrowth advocates for the need to produce and consume less in order to achieve ecological sustainability (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015). At its core, degrowth wants to address and prevent further environmental degradation, which growth economics have accelerated (Redclift 1996). It challenges the dominant modernization development theory, through rejecting the myth of unlimited growth (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015). Likewise, ecofeminism highlights the relation between the abuse of natural resources and the exploitation of women (Moller 2005). It calls upon women to unite themselves with ecological causes, so as to radically reshape the power relations and domination which have caused the ecological crisis (Bianchi 2012).

At the degrowth conference in Leipzig 2014, the abovementioned problems of overconsumption and environmental degradation were further discussed within a German setting. Here, two feminist groups attended and aligned themselves with degrowth, namely Trouble Everyday Collective (TEC) and Care Revolution (CR). They clearly impacted the outgoing statement of this conference, which was as following:

*Growth without environmental destruction is an illusion, thus industrial countries need to decrease their consumption. This means, that some concessions to luxury might have to be made which have become conveniently available. The necessary transformation to a degrowth society has to be peaceful, bottom up and aim to overcome capitalism. Further female emancipation has to be a central theme in all this (translated from German, Eversberg and Schmelzer 2015).*

## 1.1 Research question

### **What are the possible contributions of ecofeminism, in theory and in practice, to support the degrowth movement?**

To answer the main research question, this thesis will first analyse existing articles, highlighting the contribution ecofeminist scholars have made to degrowth, in particular where addressing overconsumption is concerned. In the next part, two German feminist movements, which have already aligned themselves with degrowth, will be introduced and analysed from an ecofeminist perspective. Finally, reflecting on whether the relationships of feminist movements towards degrowth align with the theoretical contributions shall clarify how theory and practice differ or complement each other in their aim to support the degrowth movement to address overconsumption. Towards this end, the following sub-questions are proposed:

- Which contributions have ecofeminist scholars made to degrowth when it comes to addressing overconsumption?
- To what extent have feminist movements in Germany already aligned themselves to the degrowth movement?
- Does the relationship of feminist movements towards degrowth align with the contributions given by ecofeminism on degrowth?

## 1.2 Methodology

This thesis will consist of a literature study, which is feasible within the boundaries of the Bachelor thesis setting of the major in Sociology of Development. To start off with, it is initially necessary to study the already available and existing academic literature on degrowth and ecofeminism, as well as literature specifically addressing the synergy between these two theoretical frameworks. Within this research, these frameworks will link to the context of Germany, where many scholars and both practice cases come from. Further, additional non-scientific sources from the German blog and network on degrowth shall be analysed, alongside the related book 'Degrowth in Bewegung(en)', which translates to: Degrowth in movement(s) (D'Alisa, Demaria and Giorgos 2015). I will analyse two feminist social movements, which, on this forum, have linked themselves to degrowth and look at the relationship and contributions they have provided to the degrowth debate in Germany. To answer my central research question, first the two concepts will be explained individually, to then build up to the contributions and critiques ecofeminism has on degrowth. From there it will move on to the feminist social movements and how they view their relationship to degrowth in Germany. Combining the outcome of the analysis of the theory and how feminist social movements can contribute to degrowth will make up the final part of this thesis.

## 2. Contributions of ecofeminism on degrowth

### 2.1 Conceptual framework

The two main concepts of this thesis are degrowth and ecofeminism. In the first part these shall be introduced and reviewed. To start off, the background of these two theories and how they developed will be presented, to show how they complement each other. The degrowth theory/approach results from a fear of dwindling resources and ecological degradation, which endangers human life, whereas ecofeminism developed onwards from feminism, combining it with environmentalism and a fear that capitalism is exploiting both woman and nature. Thus, both theories address environmental issues, but, due to their different starting points, with rather varying approaches. In order to understand the different nuances of degrowth and ecofeminism, the conceptual framework will introduce these two theories independently at first, before later going into the contributions which ecofeminist scholars have made to degrowth.

#### 2.1.1 Degrowth

At its core, degrowth wants to address and prevent further environmental degradation, which growth economics have accelerated (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015, Redclift 1996). Dominant modernization development theory here usually problematizes issues such as overpopulation, technological unsustainability and failing policies, which all are predominantly problems in the global South (Bandix 2017, Princen 1999). Degrowth, on the other hand, links environmental problems directly to consumption in the North, shifting the development gaze away from the South (Bandix 2017). This approach is new, challenging dominant modernization development theory from within the "belly of the beast", and (radically) changing its direction towards problematizing the North (Kothari, Demaria and Acosta 2014 p.366). Initially, the term was brought up after the *Limits to Growth* report in 1972, to envision an alternative to growth by André Gorz (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015). Degrowth, here, must not be understood as a declining GDP, as that is what is referred to as recession, but stands for a different path forward than evermore growth (Kothari, Demaria and Acosta 2014). This challenges the assumption that only further economic growth can raise living standards, by increasing production and consumption (Bauhardt 2014). It has, presently, developed to a radical Northern internal critique on growth, capitalism and commodification (Bandix 2017). The vision promoted is an ecologically stable society, restraining from resource exploitation, promoting sharing, simplicity and caring to become values in society again (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015). From an ecological economist perspective, Schneider, Kallis and Martinez-Alier (2010) define it as: equitable downscaling of production and consumption, reducing the amount of natural resources consumed by societies.

There is a slight misconception that degrowth is purely about consuming and producing less. But, far from that, it even more so promotes a change in the imaginary on what society needs and enables us to envision an alternative to capitalism (Bock 2015). The idea is to have a qualitative change with fuller and diverse lives, instead of continued quantitative increase of Gross National Product (GDP). This is, currently, still a main standard of nations such as Germany, where growth accelerated to 0.6% this year, to calculate the wellbeing of a country (Financial Times 2017). This, shows how our society views growth as something inherently good to strive for, and that we evaluate a nation's success with their GDP. Changing this image is where degrowth hopes to start off through promoting a change in the way we view growth. Although, on a global level, it has not yet been institutionalized, local communities and social grassroots movements have become active agents spreading practices of degrowth (Bendix 2017). With the movement still growing, it has already gained a lot of attention from other movements, and created a global network, as well as conferences similar to the one in Leipzig in 2014 (Bock 2015). This year, three more conferences are on the degrowth agenda, in Malmö, Mexico City and one in Brussels discussing degrowth ideas with the European Parliament. As well as a degrowth summer school taking place in Leipzig this year.

Next to degrowth's visionary feature of creating a societal structure less dependent on growth, it also provides a sharp critique of the current system. As it questions the effectiveness of sustainable development, arguing that any strategy based on economic growth cannot be environmentally sustainable. Further, criticizing the development ideas of late capitalism which are, again, based on growth (Vanhulst and Beling 2014). Three recurring issues, most commonly critiqued by degrowth scholars, are obviously growth, as well as environmental degradation, consumption and production patterns, which are all embedded in the capitalist system that, accordingly, support these.

## **Growth**

Growth, is defined economically as the increase of goods and services produced and needs ever-growing production and consumption to ensure continuity (Victor 2015). Extraction of fossil fuels and other natural resources ensure economic growth. However, the availability and abundance of these is diminishing, as has been pointed out in the Limits to Growth Report (Meadows et. al. 1972), as well as shown in the planetary boundaries framework (Meadows et al. 1972, Rockstrom et al. 2009). Growth is often seen as an indicator for improving welfare, however with the limits and the boundaries of our planet being stretched, tipping points have already been forecasted, where climate change will diminish our living standards (Redclift 1996). Thus, continuous rising growth and the implications, could in future cause an overall decrease in welfare. Affluent countries, such as Germany, do not need aggregate growth in order to ensure the basic needs of all citizens

being met. This can be accomplished by more equal distribution, ensuring a less wasteful use of resources (Hirsch 1976).

### **Environmental degradation**

Environmental degradation has been directly linked to growth economics, by degrowth, as well as other environmental, scholars. Thus, addressing growth acceleration is assumed to tackle further degradation (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015, Redclift 1996). They agree, that human activity is changing the earth's ecosystem by exploiting its natural resources. This is threatening global biodiversity, diminishing mineral resources and leading towards an overall decrease in the resilience of our ecosystem (Griethuysen 2009, Rockstrom et al. 2009). Degrowth emphasizes the existing competition between ecosystems and the industrial production and consumption systems (Kallis, Kerschner and Alier 2012). Conclusively, for the environment, economic degrowth would be a chance to at least prevent further degradation (Kallis, Kerschner and Alier 2012). Furthermore, by ensuring healthy ecological conditions, degrowth aims towards maintaining human well-being on a world scale in the short and long term (Schneider et al. 2010). To achieve this, degrowth envisions a socio-ecological transformation, where we consume less, in balance with nature's ability to reproduce (Bendix 2017).

### **Consumption and production**

As elaborated above, consumption and production patterns are viewed as a main issue to tackle by degrowth scholars. This is a unique approach in its profound questioning of the status quo of consumption and production patterns in a capitalist economy (Bauhardt 2014). Consumption patterns, which, in affluent countries such as Germany, are very high, supporting the individual's consumerist lifestyle in the North (Bock 2015), are directly linked to environmental degradation (Princen 1999). To an equal degree, the same goes for the exploitive production processes of natural resources predominantly located in the global South (Bendix 2017). In this way, Germany and other Northern countries externalise the environmental cost of their consumption to the South, where pollution, water contamination and deforestation further marginalise the poor living in the periphery (Paech 2012, Redclift 1996). Kothari, Demaria and Acosta (2014) argue in favour of the necessity for society to have a smaller metabolism, with a redistribution and downscaling of production and consumption patterns. This, when done in a democratic manner, shall lead to environmental sustainability and social justice, while, at the same time, maintaining welfare standards (Demaria et al. 2013). Therefore, the goal is not just to consume and produce less, but to do this in a socially emancipatory and democratizing way (Bock 2015).

### 2.1.2 Ecofeminism

Sturgeon (1997) defines ecofeminism as the theory which binds environmentalism and feminism, by acknowledging that both nature and women are exploited. Furthermore, it can be understood as a critical theory of capitalism and patriarchy, which, ecofeminists argue, has produced a system devaluing reproductive activities of nature and woman (Bianchi 2012). Ecofeminism developed from feminist movements which were engaged in ecological critique. Starting off, at the first conference in 1980, at Amherst US, - *Woman and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism* - sparked interest into this strand of feminism (Sturgeon 1997).

Ecofeminism argues, that the hegemonic male-dominated system overvalues productive activities, exploiting resources, nature and women, especially in the South (Mies and Shiva 1993). These neoliberal, growth-based strategies, rooted within patriarchy, fail to value reproductive processes necessary for life to sustain itself (Bennholdt-Thomson 2010). Thus, ecofeminism directs its critique both towards capitalism as well as patriarchy, and acknowledges the link between these two in producing environmental degradation (Mies and Shiva 1993). Ecofeminism envisions a future where we liberate ourselves from patriarchal ties and embrace our connection to the natural environment (Bennholdt-Thomson 2010). Most of all, a liberation of the consumer is perceived as necessary by Maria Mies (1993), so as to look for alternatives to commodification in order to satisfy our fundamental human needs. It calls upon women to unite themselves with ecological causes, to radically reshape the power relations and domination which have caused the ecological crisis (Bianchi 2012). Ecofeminists want woman to advocate for life, respecting plurality and difference, where 'Mother Nature' is cherished (Bock 2015).

Critiques of ecofeminism are also abundant, with many pointing out its essentialist standpoint where it risks abiding the dichotomy between men and women, as well as that between culture and nature (Sturgeon 1997). It links the low social status of women to that of nature, arguing that their undervaluation is correlated (Biehl 1991). Compared to other feminist theories, rejecting gender differences and promoting equality, some ecofeminist such as Starhawk (1990) even argue that woman have a closer connection to nature and are, therefore, more capable of saving the planet. Furthermore, it differs from other feminist theories, which encourage women to break glass ceilings and achieve more influential careers, as it tries to dismantle the capitalist system and not improve the female position from within. Also, where feminist thought is often considered angry and critical, ecofeminism has also been dismissed as utopian (Sargisson 2001). However, Sargisson (2001) argues that this may be its main advantage, since it brings creativity and possibility to imagine an alternative society, where woman and nature are valued as equals to men and where we live in harmony with nature. Ecofeminism, like degrowth, has both a

visionary component as well as a component sharply criticizing the current capitalist patriarchal system. The capitalist production and consumption patterns leading to environmental degradation are seen as the root cause of the problem. As mentioned, its utopian features enable us to think of alternatives, whilst its criticism explains why an alternative is necessary (Sturgeon 1997). The main issues recurring, are those of undervalued reproductive activities of nature and woman, as well as their exploitation. Ecofeminism here differs also from some other feminist thinking, where it does not focus as much on empowering women in the workplace for instance. Even more so some ecofeminist focus on reproduction can be seen as problematic, as Bianchi's (2012) praise for the women's role of reproducing and protecting human life could also be misinterpreted as a reduction of women to those tasks. Although, Bianchi (2012) ultimately clearly writes that the aim of ecofeminism is to break the ties of patriarchy and free women and nature from exploitation.

### **Reproduction**

Reproduction processes are essential towards maintaining economic processes and the capitalist market, nonetheless they are undervalued or taken for granted (Mellor 2006). Nature and women are considered an unlimited resource, with the economy disregarding the reproductive activities they perform and neglecting to acknowledge their reliance on them (Bianchi 2012). Failure to recognise the importance of reproductive processes, which preserve life, is linked to productive processes viewed as superior due to the direct profits derived from them (Bennholdt-Thomson 2010). Ecofeminists support the view that the disregard for nature and women's reproductive activities both stem from the patriarchal capitalist system being more focused on producing than nurturing (Mellor 2006). Bauhardt (2014) addresses the crisis of social reproduction, which can be understood as diminishing the availability of care work in a capitalist society, where economic logic might prevent people from practicing reproductive activities.

### **Exploitation**

A core notion of feminist theory is the exploitation of woman under the patriarchal system. Ecofeminists point out that it is exactly this skewed power system which also pillages nature, viewing both as expendable resources (Mies and Shiva 1993, Bianchi 2012). Women are exploited with the unpaid work they are expected to perform in the private sphere, which are nonetheless crucial for an economy and a society to run (Perkins 2010). This form of exploitation leaves woman to suffer under the double burden, where they need to balance the paid and unpaid workload (Mies 1993). Nature, on the other hand, is exploited in the production processes of capitalism, and, often, in the process, destroyed beyond repair with ecosystems being largely disregarded (Mies and Shiva 1993). Thus,

ecofeminism advocates for woman to unite themselves with ecological causes in order to fight the exploitation both woman and nature under the patriarchal system.

### **Capitalist Consumption and Production**

The deeply rooted, anticapitalistic theme prevalent in ecofeminism goes beyond that of arguing that our current system is patriarchal and exploits women. It directs the responsibility of environmental degradation towards all of us; through the process of consumption and production we participate in environmental destruction, where, through our complicit behaviour, we sustain and reproduce the current system (Bianchi 2012, Charkiewicz 2009). Ecofeminists further highlight the global differences women face, where the poor, especially, suffer the most under these exploitive conditions to increase production and consumption. The same can be said for nature, where, in the global south, nature is destroyed with increasing speed (Salleh 2009, Bock 2015). Here another clear connection is made between the exploitation of women and nature, in order to sustain consumption and production patterns in a system which undervalues both (Mellor 2005). To counter the dominant thought that rising production and consumption is necessary to increase welfare, ecofeminists promote ideas of subsistence consumption and satisfying human needs through care and community instead of commodification (Bennholdt-Thomsen 2010).

### **2.2 Synergies between ecofeminism and degrowth**

The criticism of unsustainable neo-liberal practices, promoting overproduction and overconsumption, and the impact on environmental degradation are issues addressed by both degrowth and ecofeminism, and go back to the 1990s (Wichterich 2014). This consensus, that environmental degradation has been exhilarated by exploitive growth capitalism, is one of the strongest synergies between ecofeminism and degrowth, with scholars from both theories advocating this link as a given fact (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015, Redclift 1996, Bennholdt-Thomson 2010, Mies and Shiva 1993). Showing that ecofeminism agrees with this core principle that underlies degrowth logic is crucial for their collaboration. Due to these similarities, Kallis, Kerschner and Alier (2012) recommend that the synergies between ecofeminism and degrowth should be explored, which this thesis continues to do (Table 1).

Degrowth	Shared goals	Ecofeminism
Protect natural resources	Environmental protection	Stop exploitation
Degrowth is necessary	Decrease growth	Degrowth of destructive sectors
Voluntary simplicity	Decrease consumption and production	Satisfying human needs
Capitalism seen as root cause of problems	Alternative to capitalism	Capitalism and Patriarchy seen as root cause of problems
North/South divide	Equality	Woman & Nature exploitation needs to end
Socio-ecological; where all humans and nature are cared for	Societal transformation	Female empowerment

*Table 1 Overview of shared goals between degrowth and ecofeminism, highlighting the nuanced differences towards approaching these goals.*

Production and consumption processes have been identified by both theories as a cause for environmental destruction (Bendix 2017, Bock 2015). This further solidifies a basis, on which they can find synergies to collaborate and support each other, to ensure that the problems raised are sufficiently addressed (Bock 2015).

Further, ecofeminism could strengthen degrowth's position and view on non-market work and real human needs. Both these topics are addressed by ecofeminists, with non-market work or unpaid work discussed at length, these include the work women perform for free such as care and household tasks and more on a daily basis (Perkins 2010). To ensure human needs are met, subsistence consumption is suggested and advocated for by Mies (1993). This subsistence consumption, based on nine identified fundamental human needs, including subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom, could lead to a cultural change of our view on consumption as relating to more than just shopping. The concepts of sufficiency economy, based on what a society really needs, was drafted with degrowth ideas in mind. The subsistence perspective, especially addressing overconsumption, was promoted by ecofeminists (Wichterich 2014, Mies 1993). This idea has already found wide spread resonance within the degrowth debate, also referring to voluntary simplicity (Alexander 2015). Kallis, Kerschner and Alier (2012) raise a point that these two topics could strengthen the degrowth appeal.

With a noticeable presence of ecofeminists at the Leipzig degrowth conference in 2014, raising their voices in the degrowth debate, and uniting degrowth and environmental issues with women's struggles, degrowth has started to address gender issues (Wichterich 2014). Bendix (2017) already considers ecofeminism as a distinct position within the degrowth debate, where especially in Germany Bennholdt-Thomson's (2010) book: *Money or Life* has influenced degrowth scholars to address gender aspects. Bock (2015) even writes that the inclusion of ecofeminism in the 1990's has led to a second wave of degrowth, enriching it with their critique on unsustainable overconsumption and proposing sufficiency economy

and a subsistence perspective. With the degrowth movements' aim to think tactically and from a practical view point, addressing gender challenges increases their wide appeal to envision a cultural transformation (Perkins 2010).

Under the blanket of degrowth, ecofeminism can cover and combine three important discourses, their critique on capitalism, overconsumption and exploitation, the focus on care work and the need for a different economy based on sharing (Wichterich, 2014). These discourses are seen as instrumental to transform the development paradigm into one where care, commons and a culture of enough are promoted (Bock 2015). This made for strong arguments as to why feminist discourses are so important for the degrowth debate and, subsequently, were widely discussed at the Leipzig conference, resulting in the consensus that female emancipation needs to be a key aspect of degrowth (Eversberg and Schmelzer 2015).

If reproductive activities are brought to attention in a degrowth society and care services are given more attention or even provided with public financing, Bauhardt (2014) predicts, this could lead to the revolution of traditionally female jobs, by recognizing their importance and, consequently, attaching monetary value to the jobs in question. It is crucial to clarify that reproductive activities here refers to more than just child bearing. What needs to be included here is the emotional and physical care provided to nurture humans as well as nature, which are both mostly uncompensated. Further, it does not mean woman have to have children, only that those which decide to have children should be compensated and supported, as they are fulfilling an important task in society. Since this clearly is a very sensitive topic, Bauhardt (2014) is rather cautionary with her optimism on whether or not and, if so, in how far degrowth will manage to sufficiently address this grievance.

Another topic mentioned by both Mies and Shiva (1993) as well as Bendix (2017) is global inequality. Ecofeminists acknowledge that people from the South especially suffer from exploitation recognizing here nature, women and men as victims of inequality. Thus, Mies and Shiva (1993) point out that the exploitation of women in the South needs special recognition. This is argued by Bendix (2017), raising attention towards the fact that the issues raised by the degrowth movement need to be understood within their historic context, given that production and consumption patterns are deeply rooted in capitalism, patriarchy and postcolonial social conditions. Here, both theories address how global inequality is affected by the issues they address, as well as recognising it as an important issue for degrowth to handle and discuss.

## 2.3 Ecofeminist critique on degrowth

One main part of the ecofeminist contribution to degrowth is also their critique and scrutiny of the movement, which, so far, has been lopsided, with only ecofeminism trying to reform degrowth. This thesis also aims to continue this trend on viewing the impact both the theory as well as the practice have had on degrowth. Here, as aforementioned, many ecofeminist scholars have pointed out that the degrowth approach fails to appropriately address gender issues. This leads to the need of degrowth to review key topics such as consumption and unpaid work from a gendered viewpoint, ensuring that it becomes clear how they affect different genders. Although, for instance, importance is given to a care economy under degrowth, they still contain underlying gender assumptions which are not sufficiently discussed (Bauhardt 2014). This shortcoming of the degrowth movement can be blamed on a dominance of male scholars lacking a feminist perspective (Melchiori 2012). Bianchi (2012) even warns that a failure to recognise gender issues could lead into a trap of perpetuating the existing inequality and exploitation of women. Feminist voices here are key so as to ensure such issues are recognised and incorporated into the degrowth movement, which has started to occur in Germany with the visibility of feminist movements at the Degrowth Conference in Leipzig in 2014 as well as in Bennholdt-Thomson's (2010) book: *Life or money: what really makes us happy* (translated from German) (Wichterich 2014). This criticism, although still lingering, has been met, with many feminist and ecofeminist scholars pointing out the gender issues and gender assumptions degrowth needs to address. For instance, the question of how to tackle the imbalance of unpaid work done in the private sphere, which is done predominantly by women, needs to be raised (Bennholdt-Thomson 2010). This needs to be reflected upon, as degrowth is a movement starting at the private level of the individual.

With degrowth's central aim to change consumption patterns, it has failed to fully recognize the role of women, as well as the responsibilities they hold. Here, household consumption is driven by women, who predominantly do the shopping of goods for a household, demonstrating that women have a larger influence on what is consumed compared to men, but, at the same time, carry more responsibility. This extends to the preparation of food, which is also overwhelmingly done by women, and ensuring that food is local, organic and fresh, which degrowth promotes, goes along with more time-intensive cooking methods, which convenience consumption has enabled us to forget (Bauhardt 2014). As degrowth wants to change consumption patterns of consumers, it is crucial to realise that the consumer is more often female, and that the bulk of household commodities is bought by women (Bauhardt 2014). Failing to recognize this, by leaving out a gendered view, degrowth risks of boycotting their own strategies to reduce consumption.

More so, alongside responsible consumption, there could be a demand for more self-reliance for old age, health, and education, which could lead to an increase in unpaid women's work in the private sphere. However, these issues remain as insufficiently reflected upon as the degrowth approach's central demand for a change in consumption behaviour. This change also often implies a nostalgia of the past, where our consumption was more sustainable and often based on necessity at sufficiency levels. The risk here lies in a tendency to romanticize past conditions, which were, arguably, more sustainable for nature. The peril here is forgetting the hardship women held in the past, where equality was not even up for discussion. So, for a degrowth future entailing gender equity, the power to envision must be shared, and changes that may have a particularly larger impact on women must be given extra consideration so as to not overlook gendered issues.

### 3. Feminist movements relationship with degrowth

The German degrowth blog maps the activities, projects and initiatives which are promoting degrowth ideas and which post related articles. After the 2014 degrowth conference in Leipzig, many social movements aligned themselves with the idea of degrowth and incorporated it into their own vision. In the resulting book *Degrowth in Bewegung(en)*, 32 movements are introduced, of which two are explicitly feminist (D'Alisa, Demaria and Giorgos 2015). *Trouble everyday collective* and the *Care Revolution* both have engaged with degrowth and positioned themselves within the degrowth movement. Although they do not explicitly call or consider themselves ecofeminist, the fact that they have aligned themselves with an ecological cause such as degrowth, means many ecofeminists would consider them ecofeminist. As Shiva and Mies (1993) noted, any feminist group which engages with environmental causes and recognizes the importance of nature can be considered ecofeminist, to an extent. Before introducing an analysis of the relationship of these feminist movements to the degrowth movement, it makes sense to start out by introducing the *Trouble everyday collective* and *Care Revolution* movements. Thereafter, the next step will entail looking at the contributions these two groups have made to degrowth and, later, looking into any discrepancies these approaches have at engaging with degrowth.

#### 3.1 Introduction of *Trouble everyday collective* and *Care Revolution*

Firstly, the subsequent table gives an overview, by highlighting and summarizing some important views of these two groups. Further, the table shows what their standpoints are towards the key topics previously discussed within degrowth and ecofeminism.

	<b>Trouble Everyday Collective</b>	<b>Care Revolution</b>
<b>Core aim</b>	Emancipate politics; overcome capitalist separation of production and reproduction	Change society to prioritise care
<b>Growth</b>	For profit growth unnecessary; growth only needed in sectors aimed at satisfying real needs	Growth only needed in care sectors; should decline in those sectors causing harm to humans and the environment
<b>Environmental destruction</b>	Capitalism causes environmental destruction	Capitalism destroys the ecosystem
<b>Consumption &amp; production</b>	Productive processes overvalued; consumption and production volume need to decrease	Production processes, quantity and the way we consume need to change
<b>Reproduction</b>	Politicise reproduction	Reproduction is an important part of care work
<b>Exploitation</b>	Double burden, women often expected to provide free household labour	Unpaid care work predominantly provided by women
<b>Capitalism</b>	Anti-capitalist; Marxist views	Anti-capitalist; perpetuates inequality of access to care

Table 2 Overview of feminist groups view on degrowth and ecofeminist key topics.

### **Trouble everyday collective**

Trouble everyday collective is a Berlin based group, trying to apply queer-feminist economics critique into practice. Queer feminism is a strand of feminism which have united with the LGBTQ movement, rejecting hetero normality and binary thinking of gender (Federici 2012). Further queer-feminist economics critique is derived from Marxist feminist critique on capitalism and continues to politicise reproductive activities. Trouble everyday collective engages with these topics and organises workshops and discussion meetings, even having collectively published a book called '*Die Krise der sozialen Reproduktion. Kritik, Perspektiven, Strategien und Utopien*'; translated: The crisis of reproduction. Critique, perspectives, strategies and utopias.

Their core idea is to emancipate neoliberal politics and overcome the capitalist separation of production and reproduction (TRC 2016). Productive activities are more noticeable in the public eye, higher valued by society and, what's more, are considered male, therefore often paid accordingly better. Reproductive activities, on the other hand, such as cooking, cleaning, caring for children, elderly and sick people, which take place in the private sphere, are undervalued with consequently low or no compensation. Their focus on reproduction resonates with the ecofeminist approach. Alas, there is no mention of the environments reproductive activities, which are also taken for granted (Bianchi 2012).

Furthermore, they critique biological determinism and other traditional theories, which ideologically legitimize gender roles in society, painting woman as more caring, empathetic and emotional, hence more suited for childcare and household activities (Hausen 1976). A

process which ecofeminist Mies (1993) described as housewifeization, where patriarchal forces try to keep women in their kitchen realm, supporting the male workforce with free labour. Current neoliberal capitalism, however, does expect women to work as well. This often creates a double burden for women trying to balance productive and reproductive tasks, which they are still expected to perform. This exploitation of female labour, due to societies expectation and portrayal of women as care givers, forms a core critique of most feminists. Also, ecofeminism agrees that women are exploited, with especially their reproductive activities going unpaid. However, they would also mention natures exploitation in this context (Sturgeon 1997).

The gendered division of labour, and the separation of the productive and reproductive spheres, are a central problem which queer-feminist economist critique address. This means, neoliberal capitalism prevents access to the good life for women, especially of the lower class and ethnic minorities (TRC 2016). Furthermore, TRC argues, that capitalism is unable to provide a good life for all, as it centres around making profit and not around meeting human needs. Whereas obviously highly qualified employees are generously paid for their work to ensure a good quality of life for them, many others die on a daily basis due to the harsh working conditions and the environmental destruction caused by the capitalist world order. Here is where the group trouble everyday collective at least mentions the link between capitalism and environmental degradation, which is, overall, not discussed in depth. Ecofeminism, on the other hand, clearly addresses the relationship between capitalism and their exploitation of nature, leading to degradation and perceives this as one of their core issues needing to be addressed (Mies and Shiva 1993).

### **Care Revolution**

Care Revolution are an active network in Germany, with 10 regional hubs, which organise meetings, awareness events and join relevant demonstrations related to the topic of care. Their aim is to fundamentally change society, and to prioritise care for oneself and others, according to their needs. This is necessary to achieve the good life for all, with everyone able to satisfy their needs, and without exploiting anyone (Neumann and Winkler 2016).

On the basis of feminist political insight, care-work needs to be at the centre of a critical analysis of society. Especially feminist scholar Tronto (2013), with her publication *Caring Democracy*, has been influential in spreading the idea of prioritising care within society and recognizing the many facets of care work women perform. Ecofeminism, although it discusses exploitation of women in form of free labour, does not prioritise the importance of care work in itself. Although reproductive activities can be classified as care work, this is not explicitly done by ecofeminists. Bauhardt (2014) already argues that the Caring Economy stream could be seen as part of ecofeminist thinking, but also acknowledges that

their scholars have not positioned themselves as such. But with their core issues being still quite distinctly different, it is still noteworthy to see how well these two ideas align themselves.

All people, not only young, old or with poor health, need support. Thus, *Care Revolution* proposes, ensuring an availability of safety nets, that everyone can turn to whenever they need, which is necessary to ensure a good life (Neumann and Winkler 2016). This includes that one should be able to care for others without taking on unnecessary sacrifices. Care-work entails many activities from self-health to child care, but also cooking, educating, advising and supporting oneself and others, in short; tasks that everybody performs on a daily basis. However, most of these tasks are not compensated, with the exception of care jobs such as teachers or nurses. The bulk of care work is performed free of charge by women within families, often not even being perceived as work as such by others. The subsistence perspective put forward as a solution to oppose consumerism by some ecofeminist, does touch upon some care aspects, and recognize care as a fundamental human need (Mies and Shiva 1993).

With increasing pressure to perform well, economically speaking, and with both men and woman nowadays usually being employed, mostly women suffer from a double burden, trying to balance their paid work and their unpaid care work. Neoliberal values of individual responsibility, leads people to struggle to overcome problems by themselves and incapable of asking or accepting help. Here, *Care Revolution* also addresses the issue of the double burden, as aforementioned, this issue is central in feminist debates.

The neoliberal trend in politics to cut spending and benefits, for care, education and health services, hit woman, who need to compensate if the state fails to provide social infrastructure, even harder. Wealthy families can obviously outsource care work for little money to less secure migrant household workers. In Germany, these are often east European woman working below minimum standard and pay, with these practices being tolerated and widespread (Neumann and Winkler 2016). The inequalities perpetuated by neoliberal capitalism, which profit the wealthy, are part of the care revolutions critique of capitalism, which supports ecofeminists criticisms.

### 3.2 Their contributions to degrowth

The contributions these two feminist groups add to the degrowth movement in Germany, are varied, which is why the following section will start out where they support each other, and, thereafter, move on to some criticism and impulses with which the feminist groups aim to improve degrowth ideas.

## **Contributions of Trouble Everyday Collective**

*Trouble Everyday Collective* and degrowth share the aim to overcome capitalist production, arguing that it is unable to satisfy the needs of people. So, re-evaluating what people need by questioning the status quo of capitalism is a starting point of the collaboration between Trouble Everyday Collective and degrowth. For this, looking at day to day practices and troubles is necessary to see which needs are not met under the current system. TEC already offers some suggestions on how to better satisfy needs, by promoting groups to collectively economize and support care given beyond the nuclear families, for instance in shared living arrangements. Generally, TEC supports the Cultural Revolution, which degrowth wants to achieve. However, the aim should not just be a cultural shift, but also a change in consumption and production structures, so as to alter the material basis of the current structure, which continues to overvalue productive processes (TEC 2016).

TEC's growth critique is slightly differently nuanced, compared to degrowth. They agree that growth and profit are unnecessary. What's more, their growth critique is more directly related to capitalism, where degrowth focuses more often on purely growth as an issue in itself. Here, TEC argues that care and nurse work sectors, for instance, should continue to grow, as well as other sectors necessary to satisfy real needs. More critically, TEC questions whether degrowth's focus on growth critique is also truly anti-capitalist. Their focus purely on growth and production and consumption processes leaves a door open for groups such as the green capitalist movement. TEC questions the pluralist approach of the degrowth movement, while understanding in how far degrowth may be strengthened due to its broad appeal to many views, backgrounds and focuses. They issue a warning that degrowth proponents need to ask themselves, on how much pluralism they can endure without losing their own core. Furthermore, this pluralism should only go so far, excluding groups which don't criticise patriarchy and discrimination against marginalised groups within society. There is a danger for degrowth to become a mere pluralistic alliance and lose its vision (TEC 2016).

For TEC, it is important to acknowledge history to understand society's current structure and question those checking that degrowth doesn't fall into a trap of romanticizing the past. This opposition to some strands of the degrowth movement, which, in some ways, advocated to go back in time to a simpler, more traditional way of living, are strong, as TEC argues these past structures were deeply patriarchal (TEC 2016).

Degrowth argues for a peaceful approach to achieve their goals. TEC, on the other hand, is open to practicing civil disobedience, stating that societal change has never been achieved with good arguments alone. For them, questioning of power structures is furthermore important, as they question whether the wealthy will agree to degrowth plans

to redistribute and limit growth (TEC 2016). Degrowth is at risk of institutionalisation, which is not necessarily bad, as then, at least, some demands would be met. However, this shall not bring upon any fundamental structural change. In this case, degrowth risks at becoming mere advisors to the current system, leading to at best subtle reform. This is why, TEC wants to remind degrowth to stay radical and build a new societal structure, based on solidarity and feminist values (TEC 2016).

### **Contributions of Care Revolution**

With both movements being anticapitalistic in their outset and being willing to fight together for a society based on solidarity, Care Revolution and degrowth share fundamental beliefs useful for successful collaboration. Although arguably preventing further environmental degradation is not a central aim to Care Revolution, they do agree that capitalism destroys the ecosystem. However, maybe more importantly, to them the notions of individuality and competitive efficiency, that capitalism fosters, is detrimental to social relations between humans, which form an important basis for care networks (Neumann and Winkler 2016). The Care Revolutions critique of capitalism can support broadening the appeal of the degrowth movement, by incorporating what an individual would gain from a social system change, meaning working not just towards less environmental risks, but also towards fostering stronger social ties.

Working together to envision what the good life for all should entail, is a driving force for collaboration. With degrowth and Care Revolution setting different priorities, where degrowth might focus on having less resource consumption, the latter's focus lies on more for the Care sector in society. More precisely, Care Revolution demands more time, infrastructure and material security for care workers. Therefore, they argue, a growth of the care sector is necessary to ensure a good life for those giving and receiving care (Neumann and Winkler 2016). Here is where combining both movements aim will become politically challenging as far as ensuring a shrinking of those sectors that harm the environment and humans is concerned, whilst expanding those that provide and ensure care services to grow. The balancing act between the very different priorities will be crucial to imagine a society where both human needs of care are met, as well as environmental sustainability necessary to sustain human life.

On consumption and production, Care Revolution share the view that increasing efficiency of energy and resource use won't suffice to reduce unsustainable consumption. Both agree that production processes and quantity, as well as the way we consume need to change. Care Revolution enriches this view by giving more concrete examples of achievable change, for instance through collective ownership of expensive items they want to improve availability for everybody. Increasing mobility and access to washing machines, tools,

libraries and gardens are some tangible ways to improve people's quality of life, as along with building solidarity networks. This should obviously aim at a rise in living standards for the masses and create interdependency where we can rely on others, instead of individuality and rivalry, as is currently still promoted by capitalism (Neumann and Winkler 2016).

In the search for an alternative to capitalism, one of the main contributions Care Revolution offers is its wide appeal, where everybody can relate to the movement. Care Revolution gives some impulses to degrowth on how to realise and sell social transformation to broader society. It can support degrowth's aim to achieve equitable redistribution through diverse representation and inclusion of queer-feminist thinking (Kothari et.al. 2014).

### 3.3 Divergence between Trouble Everyday Collective and Care Revolution

After looking into the unique attributes and views of the two feminist groups, Trouble Everyday Collective and Care Revolution, hold and contribute to the degrowth movement. At this point it is important to highlight that, although these are both feminist groups, significant differences can be found between them and their relationship to degrowth. They contribute with different aims, have distinct views for the future of degrowth and methods on how to achieve a new societal structure. As in the following chapter, the difference between ecofeminist theory and the practice of feminist groups shall be explored, which is important to understand the divergence which already exists within the practice by itself.

First of all, the focus of these two groups are set differently. Where Care Revolution has a more particular core aim to improve the care sector, TEC, on the other hand, aims for more of a fundamental change of society, by overcoming capitalist production. However, one should note, that TEC also incorporates the aim to strengthen care, with both envisioning a future society based on solidarity and satisfying human needs (TEC 2016). This divergence is important to understand how their collaboration with degrowth differs. Where Care Revolution just wants to ensure that care work is improved and can thus collaborate and enrich degrowth by advising them and ensuring that care work and workers are put on the agenda (Neumann and Winkler 2016), TEC collaboration might not be as smooth as they seem to aim for radical change, which generally goes along with what degrowth wants.

Due to this, Care Revolution also seems to ally themselves with degrowth as a supporting partner, which can strengthen degrowth by appealing to a broad base (Neumann and Winkler 2016). Whereas TEC, with its slightly more critical approach, might be perceived as more of a watchdog, ensuring that degrowth stays true to its values. They do this through their warnings directed towards degrowth, stressing the importance to not become too pluralistic and, instead, join up with forces which might not necessarily be anti-capitalistic (TEC 2016).

As far as their methods are concerned, these two feminist groups propose different ways for degrowth to continue. Care Revolution is happy to reform and use a large support base to pressure and, in this way, prioritise care work (Neumann and Winkler 2016). TEC methods are, on the one side, giving concrete examples of a sharing-based society, to support degrowth at envisioning a plausible alternative to capitalism. On the other side, they also include civil disobedience, which, according to them, does not always necessarily need to be pacifist. Here, one could argue that TEC is more similar to some ecofeminist strands such as Bianchi (2012), who argues that societal change is necessary even at some cost. Care Revolution here appears to be more similar to the degrowth approach of convincing the majority to join the movement via convincing arguments and achieving change from the bottom up.

Key here is to understand that, in practice, feminist theories have aligned themselves differently to degrowth, which is why it is pivotal not to generalize when talking about their contributions to degrowth.

#### **4. Comparison and bridging the gap between theory and practice**

With arguably two very idealistic concepts such as degrowth and ecofeminism, it becomes inevitable, that, when applied in a certain context in space and time, the practice will diverge to address realities. Degrowth, for instance, which started off as clearly anticapitalistic in theory, has found, in the German practice, more liberal views only denouncing rapid growth (Bendix 2017). Within ecofeminism, the gap often lies more on the focus that theory and practice choose, with the former often criticising structural problems in societies and the latter focusing on everyday struggles. However, similarities remain between ecofeminist theory and practice, and both can support degrowth.

##### **4.1 Problems addressed by ecofeminist theory and related feminist groups**

As shown in chapters 2 and 3, both the ecofeminist theory and related feminist practice unite in their critique on capitalism. Ecofeminism is an anticapitalistic theory continuously blaming the neoliberal system for neglecting reproductive activities, exploiting women and nature, as well as exasperating environmental destruction through consumption and production patterns (Sturgeon 1997). The practice also shares the general critique of capitalism, as it has failed to provide a good life and neglects care work such as reproductive activities. Although this critique clearly varies in its focus, with the theory clearly problematizing patriarchal capitalism more so than the feminist groups. Overall, both agree that structural change is necessary in order to address female exploitation as well as environmental destruction.

Furthermore, both theory and practice work at creating a vision or alternatives for the future, through the creation of utopias. This tool is used to create an imaginary of how life could be. Whereas ecofeminism paints a future of female solidarity with nature and the demise of patriarchal capitalism (Bianchi 2012), Trouble Everyday Collective shows how to emancipate politics by reevaluating reproductive activities and Care Revolution, showing how care, instead of growth could improve our lives. Thus, both theory and practice try to make appealing arguments for a change in our imaginary to pave the way to a different future.

Reproduction is an issue addressed by both, from various angles. According to ecofeminism, reproductive activities of both women and nature are undervalued by capitalism (Bianchi 2012). Where the practice is more concerned with female reproductive activities, which TEC and CR argue are underpaid, due to their gendered nature, compared to productive activities that are paid more. The overarching criticism, though, is the same to acknowledge the importance of reproductive activities.

Another reoccurring problem in both is the exploitation of women, through the unpaid care work they are expected to perform in the private sphere (Perkins 2010). This struggle of the double burden, that working women face is considered by both as a way that the current neoliberal exploits and thus profits from the care provided by women free of charge.

The third main problem, addressed by ecofeminism, of capitalist consumption and production, only the production side is discussed by both. With ecofeminism clearly showing how exploitative production activities are harming the environment and the practice, arguing that they are unable to satisfy human needs.

## 4.2 Problems less dwelt on

Although, as shown, there are many similarities between the theory of ecofeminism and related feminist groups in practice, the disparities are still striking. Here, differences can be in the shape of focus on and acknowledgment over an issue, but even disagreement exists between the theory and practice.

Firstly, one issue that is more focused on within ecofeminism and not so much discussed in either of the groups in Germany, is environmental degradation. Of course, both feminist groups acknowledge the issue within the context of positioning themselves with degrowth and recognize the importance to act. However, within their works and their discussions, feminist groups in practice do not prioritise neither stress this issue. Rather, the two feminist groups analysed here only agree with the degrowth movement that environmental degradation is a problem, without further considering it (TRC 2016, Neumann and Winkler

2016). Ecofeminism, on the other hand, obviously problematizes environmental degradation, making it a priority and linking it to the broader problem of our patriarchal society, and, thereby, something to overcome for a better future (Mies and Shiva 1993).

Another issue, which is discussed more extensively within the analysed feminist groups than within ecofeminist theory, is care. Although ecofeminism does talk about biological reproduction, the feminist groups and Care Revolution in particular link reproduction to care -giving. Here, all types of caring activities are classified as reproductive activities, from child birth to elderly care. With care being a central issue in the group CR, it is thus their primary objective to ensure that degrowth takes this into account (Neumann and Winkler 2016). Although it is very important to acknowledge that ecofeminism does demand the revaluing of reproductive activities, they do not specify explicitly that this encompasses much more than child birth. Other feminist scholars, such as the aforementioned Tronto (2013), do however, on a theoretical level, delve into the merits of a society that values care, which would be interesting to analyse, as far as its compatibility with ecofeminism is concerned. One reason as for ecofeminism not incorporating the full issue surrounding care work into their theory would be that, due to the link between nature and women, they constantly draw on, which is particularly strong in the area of reproduction. Furthermore, the practice, although agreeing with ecofeminism and degrowth overall as far as the problems with capitalism and growth are concerned, disagree slightly the care sector is concerned. Here, *Care Revolution*, in particular, argues that this sector should continue to grow, as it would substantially improve women's and all life (Neumann and Winkler 2016). As ecofeminism and degrowth mainly criticises capitalism and growth as a whole, they do not dissect it into its separate parts and discuss merits and follies of individual sectors in depth, thus, the stance of ecofeminism on the care sector, specifically, is unclear.

Lastly a significant difference lies in the linking of nature and women in the theory compared to the practice. Where ecofeminism continuously stresses and makes an argument for a strong link between nature and women in all areas from exploitation, reproduction to discrimination within the capitalist patriarchal society, the practice, on the other hand, quite contrarily refrains from stressing the link of woman and nature, focussing primarily on women's everyday issues such as their standing in society and care work given freely. Thus, here, a divergence can be seen between the theory and the practice, where ecofeminism stresses a link that the practice barely acknowledges. Although the practice does mention the issues with nature's exploitation and the need to end this in order to create a sustainable future, this specific link between nature and women's exploitation barely surfaces. That being said, clearly, the fact that these two feminist causes have

aligned themselves to an environmental cause such as degrowth shows, indirectly, that there seems to be some kind of link between these two topics.

### 4.3 Enriching degrowth by incorporating both practice and theory

So, finally, after having highlighted the differences and similarities of the theory and the practice, it is time to analyse how both parts shape degrowth. Both have a strong interest in shaping the path of degrowth and ensuring female voices are heard and represented within the degrowth movement. This, already is a huge manner in which they could enrich the degrowth vision, by ensuring that there is equal gender representation and that the treated topics have been viewed from a gendered perspective. Here, especially on the three key topics of degrowth, growth, environmental degradation and consumption and production, as previously defined, both the theory as well as the feminist groups have points to add.

On Degrowth's core aim to reduce growth, ecofeminism supports the general aim but is wary of the execution. Degrowth wants to predominantly decrease production in order to ensure less wasteful resource use and keep welfare steady via a more equal distribution (Hirsch 1976). Ecofeminism, on the other hand, fears that this decrease in production could mean more work for women as has been in the past. The feminist groups both generally agree with degrowth in so far as believing that many sectors should degrow, especially those which cause harm to humans and the environment. However, they also point out that sectors such as care and those related to satisfying basic human needs should still grow. This is a very important point to raise, in order to make degrowth more appealing, and not just sound like the degrowth idea boils down to go back to the past. So, the rationale of care, commons and a culture of enough, raised by ecofeminists, could be seen as solutions for a future that overcomes the pitfalls of the past, as well as landmark the next development paradigm. The feminist groups at the Leipzig conference also highlighted these ideas, further reprioritising human needs above growth, accumulation of capital and material goods consumption (Bock 2015). With their more nuanced critique on growth, the feminist theory and practice can enhance degrowth's argument, by allowing them to clarify more precisely how degrowth would play out in different sectors. This may be achieved by providing an appealing alternative vision for the future, where human needs are met, and not one where we just go back to past ways. This is particularly where the original critique of ecofeminists, that degrowth risks romanticizing the past, can be overcome with the feminist theories' recommendations of a sector-based approach to degrowth that would include a focus on ensuring equality.

The main reason why growth is identified as a major problem by degrowth is that it causes environmental degradation (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015). Thus, another core topic is

environmental degradation. Here, it might be less obvious in how far the feminist theory and practice enrich degrowth. Both the feminist theories as well as the practice share degrowth concerns for the environment and put the blame on capitalism for causing its demise. Ecofeminism is also deeply concerned with how capitalism is destroying our ecosystem and argues that their production processes are exploiting nature similarly as exploiting women by taking both for granted (Mies and Shiva 1993). This approach of humanising nature and, thereby, evoking sympathy could also be used by degrowth so as to rally more people behind their cause. Further, as environmental degradation was one of the main issues discussed at the degrowth conference in Leipzig 2014, the feminist groups there could support degrowth in spreading the discussion. Also, as degrowth sees the solution to environmental degradation in a social-ecological transformation, where we consume less in accordance to nature's ability to reproduce (Bendix 2017), the feminist groups can provide support in realising this aim. As both feminist groups introduced here want to bring along a radical change in society, they can be strong allies with degrowth to advocate this change. As all parties want to ensure that human's wellbeing and needs are met, making sure that the environment can keep up in the long term is important to all parties involved. The Leipzig conference, as well as other degrowth and climate conferences, shows that this concern is shared by many and linking these causes will create a wide network to tackle the issue.

Following these, degrowth has identified consumption and production patterns as a core issue, where change is necessary in order to reduce growth and, thus, also environmental degradation. This unique approach of challenging the current unsustainable consumption and production patterns is supported by both ecofeminism as well as by the practice. For instance, TEC wants to see a Cultural Revolution, where consumption and production structures change to a less material basis, as this overvalues productive processes. Ecofeminism, being the critical theory that it is, also implicates and blames all, with their complicit behaviour through consumption, where we then become part of the problem and, therefore, also have to be part of the solution. Here, not only do they support this aim, theory and practice alike both put forward suggestions on how to make a society that produces less tangible (Bianchi 2012, Charkiewicz 2009). As degrowth's aim is to ensure a downscaling of production and consumption, this should not only lead to environmental sustainability but also should maintain welfare standards (Dameria et al. 2013). To overcome commodification and individualism, both theory and practice put forward ideas of community, care and sharing to decrease consumption. As aforementioned, ecofeminism has promoted the idea of subsistence consumption to satisfy fundamental human needs and address overconsumption and focus on the real needs of society (Mies 1993). These ideas, as they coincide with degrowth ideas, have already been incorporated into the theory of degrowth in many ways, with degrowth also referring to this as voluntary simplicity

(Wichterich 2014, Alexander 2015). Care Revolution puts forward very concrete suggestions which can enrich degrowth, such as collective ownership of washing machines, tools and libraries, in order to change our attitude that we need to privately possess every product. This idea can be used very broadly by degrowth, and practice can even already be seen in Germany such as the use of car sharing sites, community fridges, where locals share food they bought in bulk, and community gardens that have increased in popularity.

All these more concrete solutions to change our consumption behaviour are very useful to degrowth, by engaging the public in a conversation on where to start, since the overall aim to decrease growth and environmental degradation can be viewed as too distant to many individuals unable to see how they can have an impact on an individual level. They can thus be seen as empowering tools to use, so as to motivate people to engage with degrowth practices.

## 5. Discussion

This research, set out to see what the possible contributions of ecofeminism in theory and in practice are, to support the degrowth movement. As we have seen, degrowth shares most aims with ecofeminism in theory as well as practice. With all advocating for a societal transformation and ecofeminism trying to support as well as shape degrowth's vision. They share their critique of capitalism, consumerism and environmental destruction (Bock 2015). So, from that point, ecofeminist theory mostly supports degrowth by strengthening their argument as well as broadening the narrative to include a feminist perspective. Therefore, scholars from both sides have stressed the close synergies that exist and suggested that further research should be done (Kallis, Kerschner and Alier (2012), which besides this thesis also others have explored such as Melchiori (2012). This research then, goes beyond analysing the similarities and investigates how degrowth can adopt the ideas of ecofeminism to improve themselves.

Especially, the results on how ecofeminism can improve on the main aims of degrowth are a key outcome of this thesis. Here was identified how ecofeminism in theory and in practice view and support degrowth's goals to reduce growth, environmental degradation and consumption and production patterns. These findings go beyond previous research where degrowth was analysed from an ecofeminist perspective, which Bauhardt (2014) had done. There supporting critique was raised, such as the key finding also highlighted in this research, that degrowth needs to analyse their topics from a gendered perspective. This research showed how especially the two feminist groups, TRC and CR, with their more concrete suggestions can directly shape degrowth. With the analysis of these suggestion making up a unique feature of this research.

## 6. Conclusion

In this thesis, the contributions of ecofeminism in theory and in practice to support the degrowth movement are analysed. Starting with an introduction of both concepts of degrowth and ecofeminism, similarities were highlighted and criticism of ecofeminism on degrowth. The similarities were plenty with degrowth and ecofeminism sharing similar goals and supporting an overall aim to reduce environmental degradation. Although, as mentioned some discrepancies also exist between degrowth and ecofeminism. Namely the worry that degrowth romanticises the past as well as reprimanding it to ensure that issues are viewed from a gendered perspective (Bauhardt 2014). Here, the practice stepped in and ensured that feminist voices were heard at the degrowth conference in Leipzig and ensured that female emancipation should become a core aim within degrowth (Wichterich 2014). So, even the critique of ecofeminism on degrowth can be seen as a valuable contribution, when degrowth acknowledges it and adapts to improve themselves.

In order to look into what contributions feminist groups can give to degrowth, this thesis analysed two groups, who were present at the degrowth conference in Leipzig. Trouble Everyday Collective and Care Revolution, both again shared many core notions with degrowth. They were particularly supportive by giving concrete suggestions on what the degrowth movement should do to gain wider appeal. With TEC's view that halting growth should only be done in productive sectors which harm the environment, not in for instance care sectors that provide essential human needs. This gives degrowth a chance to nuance their vision on how an economy that decreases their growth should look like more specifically.

The final part of this thesis shows, that through incorporating both the theory and the practice of ecofeminism, degrowth can improve their appeal and strengthen their arguments on how to achieve their main goals. Ecofeminism particularly can support degrowth, in their shared worry over environmental degradation, their critique on capitalism and also ensure that degrowth views their topics through a gendered perspective. The feminist practice, on the other hand, can help create an alternative vision for the future that is relatable to everyday practice and how to realise degrowth ideas in smaller tangible steps, ensuring that needs are met and welfare for all is maintained. This close to home approach of both theory and practice, where we look at what one can already do on a small level, has also already been identified by degrowth as a good approach for the future by Perkins (2010). So, through incorporating both theory and practice of ecofeminism, degrowth can strengthen their approach by responding to some criticisms and gather wider appeal of their movement by incorporating the many suggestions put forward.

All of these findings to enrich degrowth, can support to achieve a change in public opinion on the issues of growth, environmental degradation and production and consumption and how these topics relate to one another. This combination of arguments to gain appeal for degrowth and suggestions to apply concrete ideas to meet human needs can be good tool to reach out to consumers and show the follies of overconsumption, whilst also providing alternatives and solutions.

### 6.1 Limits and suggestion for further research

As my research particularly focuses on Germany, in order to gather a more diverse picture on how ecofeminism in theory and in practice can contribute to degrowth, it would be important to look into the context of other countries. As the discussions surrounding degrowth are unique in different settings, the contributions and alignment between degrowth and ecofeminism presumably will differ, depending on the context.

Within this research, two German feminist groups have been analysed as far as their relationship with degrowth is concerned. However, as already mentioned earlier, it is important to realise that the practice presented in this study is only a small part of feminist activist groups/movements, that have already linked themselves to degrowth. Therefore, any research going on from this, that goes and incorporates more and other feminist groups, should help show further contributions and ways feminism can enrich degrowth.

Going on from this research, with degrowth still expanding and gaining popularity, it will be interesting to see if and how the feminist movement will influence the future of degrowth. This year, the next degrowth conferences are taking place with one in Malmö, another in Mexico City and finally one with the EU parliament. The one taking place in Malmö is in particular noteworthy, as it will have a special focus on strengthening the feminism and degrowth alliance.

## 7. Bibliography

Alexander, Samuel. 2015. Chapter 29. Simplicity. Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era. 133-136

Bandix, Daniel. 2017. Reflecting the Post development gaze: the degrowth debate in Germany. Third World Quarterly.

Bauhardt, Christine. 2014. "Solutions To The Crisis? The Green New Deal, Degrowth, And The Solidarity Economy: Alternatives To The Capitalist Growth Economy From An Ecofeminist Economics Perspective". Ecological Economics 102: 60-68. doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2014.03.015.

Bennholdt-Thomsen, Veronica. 2010. Geld oder Leben: Was uns wirklich reich macht. Muenchen: oekom.

Bianchi, Bruna. 2012. Ecofeminist Thought and Practice. 3rd International Conference on Degrowth for Ecological and Sustainability and Social Equity. Venice. 19-23

Biehl, Janet. 1991. Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics. New York: Black Rose Books.

Bock, Marisol. 2015. Considering Sustainable Degrowth from a Feminist, Transrational Perspective. Castellón. Master's Degree Final Dissertation.

Charkiewicz E., Who Is the He of He Who Decides in Economic Discourse?. in Salleh A. Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice. Women Write Political Justice, Pluto. Press, London 2009, pp. 66-86.

D'Alisa, Giacomo, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis. 2015. Degrowth; A Vocabulary For A New Era. 1st ed. London. Routledge.

Demaria, Federico, Francois Schneider, Filka Sekulova and Joan Martinez-Alier. 2013. What is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social Movement. Environmental Values 22. 191-215.

Eversberg, Dennis; Schmelzer, Matthias 2015. Über die Selbstproblematisierung zur Kapitalismuskritik – Vier Thesen zur entstehenden DegrowthBewegung. Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen. Analysen zu Demokratie und Zivilgesellschaft 1/2016. <http://forschungsjournal.de/node/2821>

Federici, Silvia. 2012. Aufstand aus der Küche. Reproduktionsarbeit im globalen Kapitalismus und die unvollendete feministische Revolution. Kitchen Politics- Queerfeministische Interventionen. Band 1. Münster: Edition Assemblage.

Financial Times. 12/05/2017. German's economy picks up further speed in 2017. Mehreen Khan. © The Financial Times Ltd

Griethuysen, P. Van, 2009. Why are we growth-addicted? The hard way towards degrowth in the involutory western development path. Journal of Cleaner Production. 1-6.

Haupt, Heinz-Gerhard and Claudius Torp. 2009. Die Konsumgesellschaft In Deutschland 1890-1990. Campus

Hausen, Karin. 1976. Die Polarisierung der „Geschlechtscharaktere“. Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben. In: Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas. Neue Forschungen. Conze, Werner (Hrsg.). Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta. 363-393.

- Hirsch, Fred. 1976. *Social Limits to growth*. Cambridge. Harvard University Press.
- Kallis, G., Kerschner, C. & Martínez-Alier, J., 2012. The economics of degrowth. *Ecological Economics*, 84, 172-180.
- Kothari, Ashish, Federico Demaria, and Alberto Acosta. 2014. "Buen Vivir, Degrowth And Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives To Sustainable Development And The Green Economy". *Development* 57 (3-4): 362-375. doi:10.1057/dev.2015.24.
- Meadows, Donella, Dennis Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William Behrens. 1972. *Limits To Growth*. 1<sup>st</sup>
- Melchiori, Paola. 2012. *Feminism and Degrowth: Parallelisms and Intersections*. The contribution of feminism to the economy of degrowth. Degrowth Conference Venice 2012
- Mellor, Mary. 2006. *Ecofeminist Political Economy*. *International Journal of Green Economics*. 1/2. pp. 139-150
- Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva. 1993. *Ecofeminism*. London. Zed Books
- Neumann, Matthias and Winker, Gabriele. 2016. Chapter 7. Care Revolution. *Degrowth in Bewegung(en) 32 alternative Wege zur sozial-ökologischen Transformation*. ISBN 978-3-86581-852-2
- Paech, Niko. 2012. *Befreiung vom Überfluss: Auf dem Weg in die Postwachstumsökonomie [Liberation from Excess: The Road to a Post-Growth Economy]*. Stuttgart: oekom
- Perkins, Patricia. 2010. *Equitable, Ecological Degrowth: Feminist Contributions*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference on Economic Degrowth For Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity. Barcelona
- Princen, Thomas. 1999. "Consumption And Environment: Some Conceptual Issues". *Ecological Economics* 31 (3): 347-363. doi:10.1016/s0921-8009(99)00039-7
- Redclift, Michael. 1996. *Wasted: counting the costs of global consumption*. Earthscan Publications Ltd. London
- Rockström, Johan, Will Steffen, Kevin Noone, Åsa Persson, F. Stuart III Chapin, Eric Lambin, and Timothy M. Lenton et al. 2009. "Planetary Boundaries: Exploring The Safe Operating Space For Humanity". *Ecology And Society* 14 (2). doi:10.5751/es-03180-140232.
- Salleh, Ariel. 2009. *Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice. Women Write Political Justice*. London:Pluto Press. 66-86.
- Sargisson; Lucy. 2001. What's Wrong with Ecofeminism. *Environmental Politics*. 10:1. 52-64. DOI: 10.1080/714000513
- Schneider, François, Giorgos Kallis, and Joan Martinez-Alier. 2010. "Crisis Or Opportunity? Economic Degrowth For Social Equity And Ecological Sustainability. Introduction To This Special Issue". *Journal Of Cleaner Production* 18 (6): 511-518. doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2010.01.014.
- Schubert, Maike, and Maria Stufflein. 2016. *Nachhaltiger Konsum. Qualitative Studie Zum Konsumverhalten In Deutschland*. 1st ed. Leipzig.
- Starhawk. 1990. 'Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism ad Earth-Based Spirituality'. Diamond and Orenstein.

Sturgeon, Noël. 1997. *Ecofeminist Natures*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge.

TRC – Trouble Everyday Collective. 2016. Chapter 26. Queer-feministische Ökonomiekritik Ohne geht es nicht: Radikalität, Kapitalismuskritik und ein feministischer Grundkonsens. *Degrowth in Bewegung(en) 32 alternative Wege zur sozial-ökologischen Transformation*. ISBN 978-3-86581-852-2

Tronto, Joan C. 2013. *Caring Democracy*. New York: New York University Press.

Vanhulst, Julien and Adrian E. Beling. 2014. Buen vivir: Emergent discourse within or beyond sustainable development?. *Ecological Economics* 101. 54-63.

Viktor, Peter. 2015. Chapter 23. Growth. *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*. 109-112

Wichterich, Christa. 2014. Searching for Socio-Ecological And Socio-Economic Transformation- A Feminist Perspective on the 4th De-growth Conference in Leipzig. In *4th De-growth Conference in Leipzig*. Leipzig.