Caring Communities for Radical Change: What Can Feminist Political Ecology Bring to Degrowth?

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Introduction

In this chapter, we conduct a conversation building from the 8th International Degrowth Conference held in The Hague in August 2021 with

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the theme of "caring communities for radical change".[1] In this introduction we start by explaining the synergies between degrowth and FPE. In Section One "Feminist Political Ecology in Conversation: Caring Communities for Radical Change" we summarise the three interventions made by Giovanna Di Chiro, Stefania Barca, and Seema Kulkarni, who presented their approaches to FPE in one of the conferences' plenary sessions. They reflect on their work on environmental and climate justice, gender, and care in order to suggest different ways that communities of care can be fundamental components of radical socio-ecological change towards degrowth. These contributions come from diverse standpoints of theory and different geographies of work and engagement. All point to the contradictions between endless economic growth and ecological balance and social justice. They also emphasise the importance of care and caring communities in resisting, questioning, and counteracting the structural racial, gender, and wider social inequalities that uphold and are perpetuated by growth-dependent economic systems. In Section Two

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[1] This chapter is based on a set of conversations around the feminist political ecology plenary held at the 8th International Degrowth Conference in August 2021. The plenary was the culmination of a series of online and in-person conversations between the authors as we collectively thought about how to bring a feminist political ecology perspective to the 8th degrowth conference through theme of "caring communities for radical change". We were interested in dialoguing with the degrowth community about how feminist theories and practices of care can contribute to the strengthening, building and imagining of communities for radical socio-ecological change. The FPE conversation was the WEGO network's contribution to the degrowth conference along with other conversations around decoloniality and arts and culture. The chapter builds on the legacy of earlier International Degrowth Conferences, specifically the 5th and 6th held in Budapest and Malmö, respectively, when the Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance (FaDA) had its first in-person meetings, followed by a number of online exchanges and initiatives, including a collective statement on Covid-19 (FaDA, 2020).

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"Towards a Feminist Political Ecology of Degrowth?", we continue these reflections with other scholar-activists who also contributed to the FPE theme at the Conference. The contributions to this section were made individually, and while the chapter has been reviewed by all the authors, it should be noted that each author has contributed their own point of view. Our discussions argue why degrowth needs to take FPE into account when seeking possibilities for just futures. In Section Three "Conclusion", we identify some shared methodological approaches of FPE as we sum up why care, communities of care, and caring practices for radical change are key to degrowth. We conclude with some points for the degrowth movement to take into account from grounded feminist transformative politics.

Synergies Between Degrowth and FPE

Degrowth is both an academic and activist framework, which seeks alternatives to current patterns of economic and socio-ecological destruction and calls for movement towards a fair and liveable future for all. Degrowth proposes a scaling down of certain sectors and aspects of the economy (such as advertising, the military industrial complex, planned obsolescence of products, and the fossil fuel industry) and supports other kinds of economies and policies (such as shorter working weeks, a care income, economies of renewables, and strong public education and healthcare systems). Degrowth transformations are envisioned as taking place in equitable and democratic ways by strategically addressing privileges so as to avoid abrupt changes that will negatively impact the most vulnerable groups and exacerbate injustice (Chertkovskaya et al., 2019; D'Alisa et al., 2014; Liegey et al., 2020; Paulson et al., 2020). Through interdisciplinary analysis, including with and through social movements and grassroots initiatives, degrowth aims to debunk the idea that continuous economic growth is necessary for modern life and civilisation, and that tweaked versions of "green growth" are capable of addressing the interrelated crises of ecological destruction, social injustice, and climate change. As Schneider and Pope (2020) eloquently summarise "degrowth is not a passive critique but an active project of hope".

However, the central issue of unequal power and privilege is often left unquestioned in degrowth propositions, especially in terms of who needs to or can afford to "degrow", whose claims and demands are represented in the degrowth movement, and how subaltern, racialised, and

gendered communities at the global and local levels would be impacted by degrowth initiatives, policies, and approaches (Smith et al., 2021). While these tensions and questions are common in many articulations of alternatives (Argüelles et al., 2017), we feel it is important to interrogate power relationships in emerging imaginaries of radical socio-ecological change like degrowth. In this chapter, we outline ways in which feminist political ecology (FPE) perspectives can contribute to degrowth analysis and political strategy. We aim to strengthen the radical potential of degrowth by problematising and pushing forward the questions of who is recognised in, or can be part of, degrowth communities of practice and thought.

An emerging realm of FPE scholarship focuses on power analyses in degrowth (Paulson, 2017), with particular attention to coloniality (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019), race (Abazeri, 2022; Gilmore, 2013), class and labour (Barca, 2019), and gender (FaDA, 2020; Saave-Harnack et al., 2019). Neera Singh (2019), for example, stresses the need for deeper mutual learning between environmental justice movements of the global South and degrowth, in order to discover common ontological grounds for "other ways of being". She argues that an examination of on-the-ground practices and epistemologies of local communities can help "reconceptualize work and care in a post-production, post-growth world" (Singh, 2019, p. 139). In a similar vein, Padini Nirmal and Dianne Rocheleau (2019) propose a feminist and decolonial perspective on degrowth that is "materially and ecologically rooted and culturally expanded" through practices of "re-rooting and re-commoning" (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019, p. 470), what they refer to as "regrowth"— practices of regeneration and collective flourishing that counter the destructive legacies and paradigms of colonialist expansion and capitalist forms of growth.

Feminist economists have been among the first to criticise GDP growth from the point of view of class, gender, and colonial inequalities (Gregoratti & Raphael, 2019; Wichterich, 2014). As scholars and activists from the "Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance" (FaDA) have highlighted, rather than understanding degrowth as just about shrinking the economy, degrowth should be focused on transforming core institutions that govern production and reproduction, inspired by and grounded in feminist traditions (Saave-Harnack et al., 2019). Part of this vision and challenge is to re-situate and re-value *care* at the centre of socio-ecological processes and systems: to treat care as a core common for a liveable future. But what is

meant by the term and concept of care? And what kind of caring practices and communities can support a radical social transformation?

FPE seeks to answer these questions in diverse ways. FPE is a convening space of research and ideas where scholars theorise different forms of power and access to resources. FPE understands people as embodied and emotional beings with "complex and shifting relationships to the natural world, embedded in place and shaped by interactions of gender, race, class, caste, culture, age (and so on)", moving towards environmental and social justice (Resurrección, 2017, p. 74). In FPE, the concept of care is theorised in various ways. In their edited volume, for example, Wendy Harcourt and Christine Bauhardt (2018), delineate some main threads of thought around care as the gendered work of social reproduction: care as a form of commoning; care as looking after and providing for human and nonhuman others; and care as interspecies reciprocity and more-than-human relations.

FPE thus highlights the central role of socio-ecological production and reproduction and the labour of care as the foundation of planetary well-being by asking more specifically: in what ways can economies be transformed in terms of provisioning and care while degrowing in a socially just manner? What can we learn, in this regard, from communities who are fighting every day for environmental and social justice, or simply for their own well-being and survival on earth? This learning might well go beyond social reproduction and the care of human families and communities to include the work of "earthcare" (Merchant, 1989) and environmental struggles in the defence of and care for more-than-human others (Barca, 2020b; Fragnito & Tola, 2021). What would this expanded understanding of care, beyond but including social reproduction, mean for a new politics of care commoning? As Chizu Sato and Jozelin Soto Alarcón point out, "community is, by definition, constituted through commoning. It is the process and site of being produced through sharing a property, a practice, or a knowledge" (2019, p. 38). Building on these different understandings of care, we ask: what are caring communities in a post-capitalist, post-growth future and what are the main challenges ahead?

In this chapter we contribute to ongoing discussions on care and communities in degrowth by looking at how societies can be reorganised in ways that promote intersectional justice and the sustainability of life. We argue that care is crucial to social and ecological reproduction as we critically reflect on the experiences of paid versus unpaid, collectivised versus feminised care work in order to build just, sustainable, and

convivial societies. We propose these ideas as essential contributions to degrowth debates.

Feminist Political Ecology in Conversation: Caring Communities for Radical Change

One of the starting points of the 8th International Degrowth Conference in August 2021 was that "it is not enough to build a movement; we need to build community". In what follows, Giovanna, Stefania and Seema reflect on how this entry point resonates with their work on environmental and climate justice, gender, and care and in what way this contributes to degrowth debates.

Giovanna Di Chiro: Practising Collective Care—Environmental Justice, Kinship, and Interdependence

Many of the panels and workshops at the Degrowth conference were exploring the core question: what does a *caring, strong, and resilient* "community" look like? I'm interested in the questions of *who* we imagine as members of our community and who we see as partners in co-creating a more caring world. I have learned a lot from the members of environmental justice and Indigenous communities with whom I have studied and collaborated over the past four decades.

One of these important mentors for me is the late Grace Lee Boggs, the Detroit-based revolutionary who, in her 100-year life, after having participated in virtually every major social and environmental justice movement of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, concluded that "social movements are born of critical connections rather than critical mass" (2012, p. 35). I think that building critical connections and dependable relationships across differences of all kinds is what fuels strong communities and robust socio-ecological movements, especially in times of escalating uncertainty and danger. But, as Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte (2020) has argued, trustworthy and durable relationships have been undermined or destroyed by historical and ongoing colonial and capitalist systems. He writes:

> As kinship-based interdependency declines, climatic disruptions can be experienced as abrupt and escalating because responsiveness becomes hard

to achieve. For whom do we reach out to as trusted partners for coordinated action?...We must take urgent action to establish or repair kinship relationships. Or else we will not have the interdependence required for responsiveness that prevents harm and violence. (pp. 40–42)

For Whyte, and many others, kinship relationships are the foundation of social and ecological *interdependence*, and when these relationships of interdependence are disrupted, then social, ecological, and climate systems are also disrupted. Caring communities are rooted in the recognition of interdependence and being in "right relationship" with all our kin, with all of our human and other-than-human relatives (Tallbear, 2019, p. 31).

The critical scholarship of activists like Whyte, Tallbear, and many others has taught me that, as we strive to build diverse communities working towards a just transition to more equitable and liveable futures, we need to ensure that our calls for degrowth, decolonisation, environmental justice, and caring communities are not just metaphors (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Part of seeing decolonisation (or degrowth) as not just a metaphor, and striving to build diverse communities of care, is about taking seriously the histories of the land that we are living on and learning about the long-standing connections to land and place and the sustainable lifeways practised by the people who have lived there for generations. Many Indigenous feminist scholars have argued that "progressive" green movements such as environmentalism, sustainability, and degrowth rely on colonial abstractions/metaphors of "the commons" as the green spaces, land bases, and natural resources that must be protected and preserved for the "common good" (Arvin et al., 2013; Liboiron, 2021; Whyte, 2020). Embracing the idea of "the commons" (including, for example, the common land bases that are needed to build and operate solar and wind farms, ecological agriculture operations, community land trusts, conservation areas, or recycling centres) without an anti/decolonial lens, sustains colonial land relations and "settler futures" since much of what is considered the *commons* consists of unceded Indigenous lands and unacknowledged historical and ongoing dispossession and devastation of Indigenous lives (Liboiron, 2021, p. 36). For many Indigenous environmental justice scholars, therefore, practising "good land relations" is an essential component for creating truly just and caring communities.

An important piece of my own critical practice has been to engage what Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) calls "land as pedagogy" by situating my research and teaching in the places, geographies, and community ecologies in which I live. Potawatomi environmental scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer has argued that part of this practice involves "indigenizing" our relationships with our places. She explains that it is "…not to appropriate the culture of indigenous people", but rather one must "live as if we'll be here for the long haul, to take care of the land as if our lives, both spiritual and material, depended on it" (2013). One example of how I strive to build kin-centric relationships living and working in the Philadelphia metropolitan region is participating in a campus-community collaborative I co-founded in 2012 called Serenity Soular. Serenity Soular's mission is to bring solar technology, sustainable community development, and solar jobs training opportunities to residents in North Philadelphia, a majority-Black section of the city suffering from the harms of environmental racism and long-standing economic and social disinvestment. We spell solar s-o-u-l-ar to emphasise our intention to keeping the soul—or our connection to the people and the commitment to environmental justice—at the forefront of our strategies to build a movement towards a "just transition" for the city and beyond (Di Chiro & Rigell, 2018).

Another example of how I imagine "otherwise worlds" grounded in care comes out of my and my students' collaboration with local activist Zulene Mayfield, long-time leader of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality of Life (CRCQL), a 30-year-old grassroots environmental justice organisation located in nearby Chester, Pennsylvania, an impoverished city whose population is 70% African American and that houses the United States' largest waste incinerator. My students and I have been working with Zulene and CRCQL for several years assisting with campaigns to shut down the incinerator and transition towards a more just, cleaner, zero waste economy in the region. Zulene has always expressed the sentiment that it's important for us to see ourselves as living in kinship relations with residents of nearby Chester, despite the fact that our life conditions may be worlds apart. She has told my students: "Chester does not have a Wakanda Shield over the city keeping the pollutants from travelling all over the region. The pollution doesn't just hover over Chester. The rest of our county is also harmed by the incinerator". This kind of kin-centric environmental justice organising is an active, embodied approach for building critical connections; to use Grace Lee

Boggs' words, it means seeing your own body, your own lifeworlds in the action. Such collaborations challenge the culture of individualism so ingrained in Western thinking. I think these critical connections make tangible what is really meant by interdependence and collective care.

Stefania Barca: Communities of Earthcare

The first story that comes to mind when speaking of "communities of care" is that of Praialta Piranheira, the agroforestry settlement in the Brazilian Amazon which inspired my latest book entitled *Forces of Reproduction* (2020a). Praialta is a particular type of protected area—what the Brazilian law calls "extractive reserve", i.e., public land which is set aside from capitalist exploitation and the GDP growth imperative and managed by communities who provision themselves via sustainable extraction of wild fruits, nuts, seafood, and other non-timber-forest-products. Brazil's extractive reserves originated from grassroots struggles for social justice dating back to the 1980s and to the Alliance of Forest Peoples (Barca & Milanez, 2021). I see these as struggles for the interspecies commons, intended here as a political community made up of forest and people that do not see their humanity as separate from the nonhuman, but rather as co-existence and re-existence with it.

This interspecies community includes Indigenous populations, but also the rubber tappers and other racialised people who call themselves "traditional", and that reproduce themselves with a variety of biomes—not only forest but also riverine ecosystems and mangroves. Their livelihood, food sovereignty, and well-being depend on the wealth of their territories, so they take care of these territories with a spirit of both earth and self-care. Zé Cláudio Ribeiro da Silva and Maria Do Espírito Santo, for example, the *extractivistas* whose story inspired my book, made a living via the extraction of the *castanha do Pará* (Brazil-nut), which they collected from the plot assigned to them within the Praialta settlement. Keeping the *Castanheira* alive and healthy, by defending it from illegal cutting and timber trafficking, was their primary preoccupation—their life project. Their idea of interspecies commoning can be heard from their own voices through the beautiful documentary film *Toxic: Amazonia* (Milanez & Loyola 2011; see also Milanez, 2015).

The communities of earthcare that Brazilians call "extractive reserves" are the product of historical agency, of social conflict and struggle, of resistance to capitalist patriarchy and white supremacy, to GDP growth,

and to the financialisation of nature over the past few decades. As the caring logic stands opposite to the logic of extraction (in the capitalist and productivist sense of the term), earthcare communities are constantly threatened and targeted with structural violence—both physical and symbolic. Today, many *extractivistas* are forced to leave the reserve and move to urban areas or to plantations to become proletarians—part of the labour force for capitalist growth. The rationale behind this is to break people's caring relationship with each other and with the land—to turn more-than-human communities into individual proletarians and resources awaiting exploitation. These pressures have been constant throughout the entire history of Brazil, and have escalated during Bolsonaro's government, a fascist mix of heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and climate denialism (Iamamoto et al., 2021). At the time of writing, the Supreme Federal Court of Brazil is deciding over the government's proposal to drastically reduce the recognition of indigenous territories—a move that spurred the largest Indigenous mobilisation in more than 30 years, with 6000 people camping in the capital Brasilia in the summer of 2021.

Feminist political ecology helps us to make sense of the story of Brazil's earthcare communities by highlighting one key component of their struggle: the relevance and value of care work, extending the focus from the domestic realm to that of the land and nonhuman environment. I borrow the term earthcare from white ecofeminist scholar Carolyn Merchant (1980), who wrote about the historically constructed nexus between women and care in Western culture, to make critical sense of women's agency in a number of environmental mobilisations. However, my understanding of earthcare goes beyond the focus on women, and also beyond environmental mobilisation itself. Inspired by Ariel Salleh's concept of meta-industrial labour (2010), and based on the story of Prailata Piracheira, I see earthcare as the labour of environmental reproduction, i.e., "the work of making nonhuman nature fit for human reproduction while also protecting it from exploitation, and securing the conditions for nature's own regeneration, for the needs of present and future generations" (Barca, 2020a, p. 32). Earth-carers keep the world alive, yet their environmental agency goes largely unrecognised in mainstream narratives of the catastrophic earth-system change epoch that scientists have called the Anthropocene. This invisibilisation of earthcare labour, I argue, has to do with the dominant cultural paradigms of capitalist, industrial modernity, a historical formation which identifies modernity with the "forces of production" and with human

geo-supremacy. Undoing the geo-supremacy perspective is thus necessary to see communities of earth-carers as part of a larger historical agency that has been of fundamental relevance to the reproduction of earth systems throughout human history.

Environmental reproduction is a feminist concept, insofar as it is based on a de-naturalisation of reproductive work, as well as making visible its social and ecological relevance beyond the domestic/subsistence sphere. It also aims to call attention to the social processes which tend to appropriate this work and subsume it within capitalist or state-productivist political economy, which prioritise GDP growth over both human and nonhuman life. Like women in social reproduction, so racialised, colonised, and/or low-income people, peasant, Indigenous, and Afrodescendant communities, have historically been assigned the role of reproducers of nonhuman nature—what economists and technocrats now call ecosystem services. Interesting contradictions can be observed in this "hidden abode"—borrowing the term from Nancy Fraser (2014)—of nature conservation. Taking mostly place outside of capitalist wage relations, this work is also non-alienated—i.e., it allows people to engage in a direct relationship with nonhuman nature and to reconnect with their species-being. At the same time, the logic of endless capitalist accumulation pushes towards the disappearance of autonomous and subsistence work by all means, including both symbolic and material violence, by financialising and subsuming all forms of care within capitalist relations. Learning from Maria do Espírito Santo, as she described her involvement in the Praialta project (Milanez, 2015), I see this fundamental contradiction of environmental reproduction as the context from which earthcare struggles emerge, as both organised resistance to value extraction and as the daily micropolitics of *re-existing with* nonhuman nature in relations of care. This is why I have proposed to understand earth-carers as "forces of reproduction" (Barca, 2020a), i.e., historical subjects with a counter-hegemonic potential, which finds expression in organised political struggle, locally, nationally, as well as globally (Goodman & Salleh, 2013).

As the 2021 degrowth conference in The Hague demonstrated, the degrowth movement, which emerged from Western critical consciousness of both planetary and social limits to GDP growth, is evolving towards a fuller realisation of the patriarchal and racial/colonial roots of the growth imperative. Together with decolonial scholarship and activism, FPE makes

a fundamental contribution to this effort, pushing a re-definition of degrowth politics based on the assumption that "the foundations of the wealth and well-being of the world rest upon the sphere of social reproduction and the labour of care" (FaDA, 2020). If degrowth politics consists in the search for a radical alternative to the hegemonic paradigm of GDP growth as the foundation of wealth and well-being, then earthcare communities must take central place in it.

Seema Kulkarni: Communities of Care as Gendered Struggles for Agency and Survival

As part of the Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM, the Forum for Women Farmers Rights) we engage on various issues faced by disenfranchised and exploited women from diverse socio-economic groups working as agricultural, forest, and livestock (migrant) workers and cultivators across 22 states of India. They face the triple burden of exploitation due to caste, gender, and class, yet they exhibit agency in multiple ways—much of it being necessary for survival. MAKAAM voices the concerns raised by its diverse members among whom are various grassroots organisations, women farmers, and labourers.

Lata is a migrant sugarcane worker, who belongs to a disadvantaged caste and class, working in the western Indian State of Maharashtra. Today, sugarcane is used not only for producing sugar. The sugar lobby is increasingly diversifying into multiple trades like ethanol and alcohol production. The sugar factory extracts more and more profit from the cheap labour of the migrant workers, especially women like Lata. Typically, contracts are made with the man of the household, leaving Lata without direct access to her wage. She and her husband work as a unit, referred to as *Koyta* (sickle), and perform arduous tasks, such as harvesting cane, tying cane bundles, and loading, unloading, and transporting them to the factory. The working day is usually 12–13 hours long as the contractor and middleman insist each *Koyta* to meet the daily target of harvesting two tonnes of cane for the factory owner, who aims to crush the cane to the maximum capacity of the factory to maximise profits. Lata and other women workers wake up at 3 am to load the trucks, often at the cost of their health. None can afford illness since missing work incurs a huge fine which is usually twice that of the wages earned. Menstruating and pregnant women thus continue to work despite the discomfort. Some women work till the last hour of their pregnancy and deliver at

the worksite itself. Single women workers often suffer sexual harassment at the workplace and have to carry their young children around during work (Shukla & Kulkarni, 2019).

When Lata is not migrating for her survival, she leases land from an upper caste landlord and engages in subsistence farming to support herself and her family. Being a poor woman from a "lower" caste has meant that she rarely receives timely support to carry out her agricultural work, and even the delayed support from the upper caste communities comes only if she can return the favours, for example, sexual favours or exchange of free labour. As a result, Lata not only loses out on getting good yields, but her mental peace is also compromised. Lata loses out because of her caste, class, and gender disadvantage. In addition to the long working day as both a sugarcane migrant worker and a subsistence farmer at home, Lata devotes additional four to five hours for unpaid household work: childcare, cooking, cleaning, and fetching fuel and water. MAKAAM supported individual women sugarcane workers to form the Women Sugarcane Harvesters Organisation, so that Lata and women farmers like her became associated with MAKAAM through their grassroots organisation.

There are many contradictions when it comes to conceptualising or reflecting on notions of care without paying attention to the gendered division of labour. The notion of care depoliticises the question of unpaid work done by women, if it is not grounded in a Marxist feminist understanding that questions capitalist accumulation based on the free labour of women, like Lata, who belong to the disadvantaged sections of society. Women's non-wage work, variously called care work or reproductive, emotional, or affective labour, is necessary for the existence of wage work and for the accumulation of capital. Broadly speaking, mainstream thinking and that from some quarters of environmental groups focus on the economic and ecological crisis, and the solutions (e.g., ecological farming and climate smart agriculture), often gloss over the unpaid or non-wage care work of women. Ecological health and the contributions of women's unpaid care work towards it will thus have to be framed in a manner that addresses upfront the question of women's ownership and control over resources. For example, ecological agriculture calls for caring for soils, selecting and conserving local varieties of seed, bringing a diversity of crops to the farm, or managing an integrated farm with backyard poultry and other animals. It is assumed that this work would be done by the women of the household, while men continue with the

business-as-usual commercialised farming that includes the cultivation of sugarcane, cotton, etc. Such harm will have to be addressed by centring the issue of care in development thinking. When considering social and political organising, we need to consider the struggle for entitlements, rights over resources, and women's unpaid work alongside the call for ecological health. By working with MAKAAM I have learned that both are needed and must go hand in hand. Ecological health cannot be framed within an extractive capitalist paradigm which free rides on the non-wage work of women and the poor and the environment.

We demand the state give us as a matter of right not only land and welfare, but also support to rebuild our soils and our lives through agroecological farming. Our two-fold strategy is thus one of reimagining our world that was in harmony with nature while addressing discrimination based on class, caste, and gender. Our struggles, mobilisation, and demands articulate both of these positions. These combined demands call for a just society that cares and values the knowledge and work of the women and men of disadvantaged communities. It values and cares for nature—land, water, and forests.

Drawing on the work of Maria Mies (1998) and others we believe that the solutions lie in reconceptualising the concepts of economy and labour. The question of women's work and rights, and the question of ecological, social, and economic sustainability have to be placed at the centre of our analysis and politics. But this requires a different view of the economy and of society, which requires that we start paying attention to the work of nature and her regenerative cycles, and valuing women's unpaid care work in the household as well as all other non-wage work for subsistence. We also have to keep in mind that communities are not homogenous and cohesive but have diverse groups, often in conflict with each other. The women we are working with have long been exploited due to their class and caste positions in this capitalist world. Their struggles have thus been to fight the caste-based capitalist patriarchy. In this new framing we have to be conscious that the burden of care does not rest with women and the disadvantaged social groups who have thus far carried this burden on their shoulders. Care and social justice will have to go hand in hand if "otherwise desirable worlds" have to become a reality.

Towards a Feminist Political Ecology of Degrowth?

Following these insights on environmental and climate justice, gender, care, and degrowth by Giovanna, Stefania and Seema, we now discuss two challenges for a FPE degrowth, one concerning how to create communities of care as we reckon with our troubling past, and the other problematising normative assumptions about health and well-being from an embodied socio-environmental justice perspective.

Linking Communities of Care and Reckoning with the Past

Panagiota: Stefania spoke of environmental defenders, and of the violence suffered as part of a struggle to care *with* nature—which she expressed through this concept of *florestania*—a violence brought about by political forces who want to break these relationships of care developed between people and more-than-human, these kinships formed in the forests in Brazil. At the same time, most recent work and activism around the commoning of social reproduction (Federici, 2019) and introducing a care income—the idea of recognising and remunerating care work—highlights perhaps more gendered aspects of care as socio-ecological reproduction and brings forward the demand of reclaiming care as commons, in a way of taking common responsibility for it in society (Barca, 2020a, p. 7). What can be potential common points between environmental defenders as caring communities, and the communities and economies that could be formed around this idea of care as commons?

Care can be understood as a "glue" concept that links demands on visibilising and valuing socio-ecological reproductive labour (the work of care and earthcare) and aligns with ecofeminist thought on how the domination and subordination of female—and other racialised, LGBTQI+, Indigenous, lower-caste and ethnic minority or otherwise marginalised—people, parallels the abusive extractivist activities that change environments and threaten life itself. Thus, care can signal the need to put life and the everyday activities that ensure the physical and emotional well-being of people along with ecological well-being, at the centre of politics and the economy (Pérez Orozco, 2014, p. 93).

In this sense, there are communities who engage with different facets of caring interdependencies: those who organise to protect forests, those who struggle for creating agricultural or solar commons, and others who

embody and fight against climate and environmental injustice in risky landscapes. A key question which we need to continue to ask is, then, how these different communities and struggles can come together, inform and complement each other.

How can we bring into conversation the everyday realities of care work and the work of doing environmental justice, in a translocal manner, horizontally, and with a common goal to change the paradigm, the narrative, and eventually, the system, towards a more complete horizon of degrowth attuned to socio-environmental justice? How important is it especially now, to speak about histories of violence and oppression as well as of stories and events that are able to inspire hope—at a time when calls for urgent action (e.g., related to climate change and often directed to those in power) in some ways risk obscuring the voices of activists and affected groups that have been *already* acting, struggling, dealing with climate change impacts and devising alternatives?

Seema: Engagement with the past is critical for reimagining the future. Social discrimination and exploitation as a result of caste, class, and capitalist patriarchy all need to be understood in a historical context. Challenging structural inequalities and unequal power relations becomes possible only in the full awareness of the histories of this exploitation. The agenda of justice-focused movements must be to move away from this past and into reimagining a future which is based on equality and equal opportunities. Can degrowth include these unsettling historical dynamics when it engages with and mobilises elements of the past that cared for nature and lived in harmony with it for a mutual co-existence, in its questioning of the growth trajectory and its limits in relation to planetary ecological balance and social justice?

FPE does not lend itself to easy generalisations. It carries within it some of the contradictions produced by patriarchal societies by identifying women with nature, as highlighted by early ecofeminist scholars, such as Mary Mellor (1994) or Carolyn Merchant (1989). Feminists working in the South were concerned with the material survival of women in poor communities who depended on natural resources (Agarwal, 1992; Mies & Shiva, 1993; Shiva, 1989). Diverse positions articulated by feminists in conversation with the degrowth movements need to be acknowledged and contextualised as we reimagine our futures. Women, especially from disadvantaged communities, are likely to be excluded if present material inequalities go unchallenged. In the Indian context for example, the continuation of the caste system is beneficial for the powerful upper caste

communities as they can retain control over means of production, division of labour, and knowledge.

Irene: Building on from what Seema states, patriarchal social norms keep marginalising women across caste and class. This is evident in rural India, where the conceptualisation of "farmers" most often reproduces the imaginary of farmers as male landowners (Agarwal, 2003; Padhi, 2012), although women perform most of the everyday work in the farm. For instance, in rural Maharashtra, where I conducted fieldwork in collaboration with Seema and other colleagues working at Soppecom, it is most often women farmers who take care of sowing, weeding, harvesting, and milking cows. Increasingly, they also engage in irrigation, a task traditionally seen as part of the male domain. From morning to evening they have their hands in the soil: their lives, and their bodies are profoundly woven together, or co-become, with the soil and the water that allow them to farm. Despite being marginalised institutionally and socially, I have often appreciated how women farmers have their ways to influence decision-making processes within the household. They play a role in deciding what to cultivate and how to organise the space of the farm; they often organise work in collective ways and collaborate, increasingly across caste lines. Counteracting patriarchal and casteist dynamics is often a subtle process. Yet simultaneously, water is increasingly scarce and of poor quality; climate change makes weather conditions increasingly unpredictable; agricultural costs keep increasing and, with it, indebtedness; the market is very volatile. There is pride and joy, and hope for the future, as well as pain and fear in women farmers' narratives.

Building caring communities, as building kin-centric communities, is a process that must go hand in hand with caring for forests, waters, and farms. It entails thinking about more-than-human ethics as a process of co-becoming across scales as Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) has suggested. To engage in such a process, it is important to learn from communities and organised movements that are *already* striving for radical change, refusing to align themselves to the violent heteropatriarchal-productivist logics of capitalism. Yet along with organised movements and struggles, a way to create transnational feminist caring communities is also that of learning from, giving space, and creating alliances with those who are fighting for more equitable and ethical presents and futures in their everyday life, often in subtle, yet transformative ways. Moving from my position of privilege and recognising the uneven and non-innocent threads through which more-than-humans co-become on earth, I orient

my engagement with women farmers in Maharashtra in this direction—inspired by the work of Seema and other members of the MAKAAM network.

Chizu: In this regard, lessons can be learned from FPE, in particular the combination of anti-essentialist Marxism and community economies, which makes it possible to see beyond the capitalist economy in ways that strengthen the project of degrowth. In Marxist thought, exploitation occurs when surplus—labour above what is necessary to reproduce the labourer—is appropriated by non-direct labourers (Gibson-Graham et al., 2000). Exploitation thus occurs not only in capitalist but also in feudal, and slave class processes, when non-direct labourers appropriate direct labourers' surplus. While the existence of capitalist class processes in the forms of capitalist extractivism in the Brazilian Amazon and capital accumulation by sugarcane factories in India is hard to miss in the reflections, there is at least one non-capitalist exploitative class in the reflections: a feudal class process within a household where a husband appropriates surplus from his wife's non-waged care work.

When building communities of care using an anti-essentialist Marxian ethic, it is crucial to recognise that exploitation deprives labourers of opportunities to invest the surplus they produced in building a community in which members take care to meet each other's needs (Community Economies Collective, 2001). Furthermore, more-than-human community economies scholars (e.g., Gibson-Graham & Miller, 2015; Roelvink & Gibson-Graham, 2009; Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019), illuminate diverse economies performed not only by humans but also by earthothers. These writers point to the interdependence of different species economies. In neoliberal capitalist relations, labour that is productive is the labour that produces more surplus, and more-than-human earthothers are objects to be consumed in production. These three reflections make visible how these relations and practices disrupt kin-centric relationships between humans and earthothers. The combination of anti-essentialist Marxism, community economies, and FPE perspectives offered by Giovanna, Stefania, Seema, and others, enable us to see often unpaid and invisible care work performed by people from marginalised communities and more-than-human earthothers. Once seen, this care work can now be recognised as productive, not because it produces more surplus but because surplus is used to build more convivial communities for all its members of the community, while discouraging socio-ecological relations

recognised as exploitative and unjust through a decolonial, intersectional lens.

Looking at degrowth (and degrowing economies) from this perspective forces us to recognise that there is no single economy. Any economy is constituted by a constellation of multiple economies and human economies are nested in human and more-than-human economies. This perspective, articulated in the reflections, redefines exploitation based on an FPE ethic of care, insofar as exploitation deprives both people and earthothers of opportunities to build a more convivial, socially, and environmentally just, kin-centric multispecies community. This understanding offers a framework that is useful for discovering how to work towards degrowth together, while remaining sensitive to historically developed, hierarchical, or unequal socio-ecological relationships that obstruct building a community of degrowth.

Embodied Social and Ecological Health

Ilenia: As Giovanna, Seema and Stefania urge us to reckon with oppressions which have been historically and materially determined by focusing on movements and experiences who strive to dismantle institutionalised violence, our conversation brings into question the issue of futurity.

Degrowth at its core engages with desirable notions of the future. FPE can amplify the standpoint, experiences, and propositions of those who have been absent or even excluded from radical political imaginaries. In the brilliant book entitled *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) reflects on Qwo-Li Driskill's words when they say, "one way ableism works is that disabled people are not even present within the imaginations of a supposedly radical future" (p. 215). It is time we take up their invitation to look at the absences that exist within degrowth imaginaries of the future. For a very long time, we have missed feminist interventions on the embodied and multi-faceted understandings of social and ecological health that complicate the binary thinking which posits and understands human and more-than-human health as the opposite of sickness, disability, unproductiveness, and disposability; in other words, what Giovanna has called in some of her previous work, "ecoheteronormativity" (2010). It is important to produce anti-ableist understandings of socio-ecological health, reflecting on how it changes over time and place, how it is politicised from different positionalities and contexts and put at the centre of multiple tactics of

anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-heteropatriarchal, and decolonial coalition-building work. By way of shaking up some of the underlying assumptions about ability in degrowth, we bring ageing and disabled bodies and communities into current imaginaries of degrowth futures and provide room for representation of crip and subaltern kinship without exploiting or instrumentalising them as a resource or inspiration. Building on our previous interventions, I would like to bring in Crip theory and disability justice (Clare, 2017; Kafer, 2013; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, see also Chapter 4 in this volume) in order to point out how it is important to see disability through an intersectional lens. Listening to those who have been excluded or oppressed due to disability can help to open the conversation about the assumptions concerning the natural bodies. Unquestioned assumptions around bodies and sexualities need to be questioned in degrowth discourses and practice to give space to dissident/othered embodiments and trouble and transform the futures we envision towards wider and more inclusive justice. We bring to degrowth the insights of feminist science and technology studies in order to challenge normative values that exclude and create barriers around disability.

Given Giovanna, Seema, and Stefania's experience and knowledge in social and environmental justice organising, we move to focus on who is included or excluded in our radical political imaginaries, such as degrowth. What kinds of knowledge, bodies, and territories, are at the margins of inclusion/exclusion not only of our current unjust societies but also of our political/radical organisations and communities?

Stefania: One example of such inclusion/exclusion dynamics relates to occupational health struggles in working-class communities. Occupational health has been long associated with public and with environmental health, but both scientific practices and management and regulation have tended to hide or underplay those connections to separate the three spheres of health (public, occupational, environmental). Moreover, "jobs blackmail" and other ideological constructs have divided communities and obstructed their search for justice and economic alternatives. Here is where the inclusion/exclusion dialectic becomes essential. Taking the male industrial worker as a reference point for healthiness has long misguided the understanding of the effects of industrial hazards on larger communities—including people with different bodies.

The male breadwinner's sacrifice for family, community, and the nation's GDP implies the silent and misrecognised sacrifice of others around them whose bodies were left out of the account. There is a

whole history to be written about the sacrificing of women's health to industrial development and their agency in reshaping dominant conceptions of health by enlarging the boundaries of whose health is accounted for, and what health means in the first place. Children's health, or that of nonhuman animals and life-support systems to which working-class communities are linked through relations of care and interdependency, are similarly excluded.

In some cases, however, the affected people themselves, and the social movements they have built, have struggled for recognition of the non-separation between different kinds of bodies and their environment. Mobilisations against the Ilva steel plant in Taranto, Italy (Barca & Leonardi, 2018) testify to a specific kind of environmental justice, what I have called working-class environmentalism: struggles for reproduction led by working-class communities in recognition of the fact that industrial growth was built upon the *sacrifice*—the supposed disposability—of their bodies and of nonhuman life in their territories.

Giovanna: A core body of critical ecofeminist literature and activism joins together disability theory, queer theory, and environmental justice praxis articulating the values of collective care and kinship relations. The work of scholar-activists such as Patty Berne and Vanessa Raditz (2019), Eli Clare (2009), Shayda Kafai (2021), Alison Kafer (2013), Mia Mingus (2022), and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2021) highlights how people living with disabilities and queer people know how to build caring communities for mutual thriving in the face of multiple crises because they have always had to "crip the apocalypse" in order to survive in a world that wants them disappeared or dead. Creativity and collective care are the cornerstones for "dreaming wild disability justice futures", argues Piepzna-Samarasinha (2021, p. 250). Such futures are made possible through the creation of "vibrant, innovative, crip-made forms of organising" such as new collectivities, alternative care-based institutions, and accessibility hubs and "homespaces" that are "continuing to save everyone's asses" providing sustenance, shelter, personal protective equipment (masks), legal assistance, and mutual aid in response to the violence of escalating climate change, global pandemics, and social precarity (ibid., p. 254).

Refusing pain—or "damage-centered" theorising and organising (Tuck, 2009), these scholar-activists are foregrounding how marginalised communities are challenging capitalism's fantasy of the "self-made man",

a fantasy based on the cultural illusions of individualism and self-sufficiency that can only be sustained by devaluing and making invisible the essential social reproductive labour performed by women, working-class people, and racialised communities (see Barca, 2020b; Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019). Instead, these writers document how queer, crip, BIPOC, and low-income communities are reimagining and prefiguring climate resilience and flourishing lifeworlds by building anti-colonial, post-capitalist economies of repair and care grounded in the principles of "interdependence and collectivity" (Clare, 2009, p. 106). Echoing this point, long-time feminist, disability, and queer activists Patty Berne and Vanessa Raditz (2019) write that we must "see parallels in the havoc that capitalism and the drive to hoard wealth has wreaked on our bodies as queer people, gender nonconforming folks, and people from colonized lands, and how capitalism has abused and exploits the land". Arguing that our collective futures depend on our recognition of the importance of caring for and sustaining both human diversity and biodiversity, they continue:

> The forces of capitalism, racism, ableism, transphobia, and homophobia may have cornered us into a vulnerable position in this unprecedented moment in our planet's history, but the wisdom we've gained along the way could allow us all to survive in the face of climate chaos. The history of disabled queer and trans people has continually been one of creative problem-solving within a society that refuses to center our needs. If we can build an intersectional climate justice movement—one that incorporates disability justice, that centers disabled people of color and queer and gender nonconforming folks with disabilities—our species might have a chance to survive.

Wendy: Reflecting on bodies and health in this discussion, I would like to add my reflections here about embodying degrowth. The idea of growth reproduces its hegemony through everyday practices and performances. In unsettling notions of gender, race, heteronormativity, and able-bodiedness we need to delink from the everyday invisibilising of difference. In the invitation to notice the everyday and embody degrowth, FPE takes up feminist decolonial meanings of seeing the body as a place from where we can start telling stories and find inner strength. As Ilenia indicates, FPE invites cultural and political resistance to the dominant patriarchal (medicalised and racialised) understanding of the "normal" body as white, male, Western, and heterosexual from which all "other"

forms of bodies differ. This form of body politics opens a space for transformative collective action which connects the body to radical alternatives offered by degrowth, asking that radical change be founded on diversity and the need for care of our own and other bodies, paying attention to the silencing of difference.

As Stefania and Giovanna have underlined, FPE further invites degrowth to be open to the possibility of talking about *other worlds* and about knowledge *otherwise* in order to unsettle dominant views of what it is to be human from world views outside the colonial frame. We need to understand how to work both across and outside a colonial frame; what are the possibilities of undoing and unsettling—*not replacing or occupying*—Euro-American conceptions of what it means to be human. What would it mean for degrowth to take on black feminist and science studies concepts of unsettling in order to constructively shift Eurocentric positions of degrowth?

In these invitations, FPE is looking at ways of relating, undoing the imaginary of growth through everyday practices. Learning from decolonial and Indigenous feminisms, ideas of relationality, responsibility, and conviviality, and walking with others in allyship, FPE's invitation is to move towards a resurgence of other ways of doing and thinking. FPE invites an openness to a plurality of perspectives and the resurgence of resistances through degrowth. Together, FPE and degrowth can build a shared, pluriversal project, capable of being home to diverse knowledge, languages, memories, and perspectives.

Conclusion

Using the 8th International Degrowth Conference as a springboard, in this chapter we explored the themes of care and caring communities and radical change from FPE perspectives and how they contribute to degrowth debates. As our chapter indicates, FPE perspectives are informed by diverse and, at times, conflicting theoretical approaches. What unites these diverse perspectives are methodological choices such as learning with marginalised communities, valuing their struggles for collective well-being, recognising more-than-human earthothers as kin in collective survival, and looking at context-specific stories as analytical starting points. We share a relational ontology and belief in the importance of intersectionality in shaping environmentally just futures. In

conclusion we look below at how our considerations for care and caring communities can strengthen degrowth's transformative potential.

Our focus in this chapter has been on FPE understandings on care rooted in our respective experiences with communities of place-based struggles for social and environmental justice. Care is critically recognised as central to both social and ecological reproduction of humans, economies, and lifeworlds. What we have pointed to is the radical potential of care collectively performed by humans with more-than-human earthothers, in work that is non-hierarchically organised among species and experienced democratically among communities. This care is a kind of glue, binding species across differences of all kinds constituted by kin-centric relationships in place.

Our chapter pointed to examples of such care—Serenity Soular and CRCQL in the US, earth-carers in the Brazilian Amazon and the MAKAAM in India. These stories illustrate what caring communities for a post-capitalist, post-growth present and future look like. Caring communities challenge the culture of individualism, undoing the geo-supremacy perspective, and while still working within states. We have pointed to how caring practices support radical social transformation including degrowth by forming strong kin-centric relationships. They also develop an ability to value "forces of reproduction", which are unseen and devalued in the capitalist, productivist paradigm (such as unpaid care work performed by women and others in the marginalised communities). They also address the discriminations experienced by marginalised communities and the harm experienced by the environment. Caring practices demand people and their more-than-human kin entitlements and rights to resources and ecological health and well-being. We have argued that taking note of such caring practices is not about romanticising "a community" and "the commons", but taking seriously the histories of land and place and learning from the peoples and earthothers lifeworlds that nourish and sustain each other over generations.

Our chapter points to the need for degrowth to take into account caring practices aware of who and what is excluded from transformative politics. We have pointed out the importance of the embodied experiences of marginalised groups: people with disabilities, queer and gender nonconforming people, people of colour, women performing industrial wage labour in working-class communities, their children and nonhuman animals and life-support systems. We ask that these lives are not marginal but central to transformative politics. Degrowth needs to take into

account decolonial feminisms, crip theory and anti-essentialist Marxism as a necessary condition for democratic politics. Radical concepts such as "commoning", "community" need to be constantly elaborated to ensure decolonial, non-capitalocentric perspectives are at the heart of degrowth critiques and transformative practices. Finally, we must pay more attention to our own bodies and our own lifeworlds and their interactions. By performing care practices together, in place and time, and making critical connections with earthothers we can produce stronger communities and movements for radical change.

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