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POST-POLITICAL CONDITION AND THE DEGROWTH IMAGINARY: RADICALIZING ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN THE FACE OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISES

POST-SİYASAL DURUM VE KÜÇÜLME TAHAYYÜLÜ: EKOLOJİK KRİZLER KARŞISINDA ÇEVRE SİYASETİNİ RADİKALLEŞTİRMEK[*]

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ABSTRACT

Discussions of alternative socio-economic futures are more relevant than ever due to the challenge of environmental breakdown. The consequences of the ecological crisis are believed to be increasingly drastic for societies in the coming decades. The bleak imagination of the future is coupled with uncertainty in environmental politics. In this context, mainstream policies have been offering sustainable development, green growth, and ecological modernization as ways to reconcile economic growth with ecological balance. Drawing insights from post-political theory, this paper argues that there is not an environmental policy in real terms for ecological transformation of society. Examining the post-political landscape in the contemporary stage of neoliberalism and sustainable development, this paper considers the degrowth imaginary as an alternative socio-economic future.

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Investigating the decline of alternative imaginaries for societal transformation constitutes the research focus. This paper makes several claims; neoliberalism in its current form marks the end of politics, post-politics has spilled over into environmental politics, where societal transformation is rarely discussed, and the political strategies of the degrowth imaginary bear potential to transcend the current impasse in environmental politics.

Keywords: Post-Political Condition, Degrowth, Neoliberalism, Ecological Crisis, Environmental Politics.

ÖZ

Çevresel tehditlerin meydan okuması karşısında, alternatif toplumsal ve iktisadi gelecek tahayyüllerine ilişkin tartışmalar giderek daha önemli olmaktadır. Ekolojik krizin, toplumlar açısından sonuçlarının önümüzdeki yıllarda daha çetin olacağı ifade edilmektedir. Gelecek tahayyüllerindeki bu kasvetli durum, çevre siyasetindeki belirsizlik ile birleşmektedir. Bu bağlamda sürdürülebilir kalkınma, yeşil büyüme ve ekolojik modernleşme gibi hâkim paradigmalar, ekonomik büyüme ile ekolojik dengenin uzlaştırılması için ince ayar stratejiler oluşturmaya çalışmaktadırlar. Post-siyasal teorinin kuramsal çerçevesiyle birlikte bu makale, toplumun ekolojik dönüşümü için gerçek anlamda bir çevre siyasetinin olmadığını savunmaktadır. Neoliberalizm, sürdürülebilir kalkınma ve post-siyasal durum arasındaki bağlantıları çözümlemeyi hedefleyen bu araştırma aynı zamanda küçülme tahayyülünün, alternatif toplumsal ve iktisadi gelecek tartışmaları açısından önemini ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. Araştırmanın odak noktasını, alternatif toplumsal dönüşümlere olan ilginin gündelik siyasetin gündeminden düşmesi oluşturur. Bu makale sırasıyla; neoliberalizmin, siyasetin sonunu işaret ettiğini, post-siyasal durumun, çevre siyasetine yayılarak toplumsal dönüşüm tartışmalarına olan ilgiyi azalttığını ve küçülme tahayyülünün siyasi stratejilerinin, çevre siyasetindeki güç durumu aşma potansiyeline sahip olduğunu göstermeye çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Post-Siyasal Durum, Küçülme, Neoliberalizm, Ekolojik Kriz, Çevre Siyaseti.

INTRODUCTION

Mainstream environmental and development policies exploited the quality of agricultural production while leading to loss of biodiversity and degradation of soil nutrients. The rate of species extinction is 10 times higher compared to earlier periods of history (Hickel, 2017). The critical thresholds in several planetary boundaries—biodiversity, the nitrogen cycle, and the climate—have been crossed (Foster et al., 2010). The probability of humanity's survival against twenty-first century hazards is low given the current trajectory (Rees, 2004). Moreover, unsustainable economic growth patterns, resulting in high levels of carbon emissions, have constituted a rhetoric of universalism (Wallerstein, 2006). The widespread adaptation of market-driven policies around the world prevents the circulation of post-capitalist imaginaries in direct contrast to the economic growth paradigm, eventually leaving the public opinion to limited choices for an alternative socio-economic future (Urry, 2011). In a conjuncture without alternative imaginaries, it is believed the future of capitalism refers to the apocalypse (Žižek, 2011).

Considering these scenarios, it is tempting to ask what our position is within 'the riddle of history' (Marx, 1988). The riddle, in a way, is about the uneasy relationship between humanity and nature. Although this relationship has been conflictual for most of history, a delicate balance was achieved. The development of capitalism, however, disrupted this critical balance (Foster, 2000: 210). By adhering to the principles of profit and competition, the capitalist system has eased natural constraints on production processes (Burkett, 1999). Capitalism continually seeks a malleable environment that can be adapted to its evolving needs (Conti, 2020). This is evident in the transformative nature of the hydraulic press and steam engines in industrial capitalism that paved the way for today's clean and renewable energy sources, which now symbolize so-called a pact between humanity and nature for steering the course toward more economic growth.

A closer look reveals that both the Left and the Right in environmental politics have made various attempts to resolve this riddle. The political Right treats the riddle as securing capitalism's survival and restoring faith in economic growth. In this context, common environmental discourses such as sustainable development, ecological modernization, green growth, and economic rationalism have been widely accepted within international policy circles. Although their rhetorical styles and metaphors differ, a commitment to techno-managerialism is a sort of unifying credo. They prioritize market-based solutions to ecological problems without pursuing radical social change. The proposals from the political Left, on the other hand, consist of a wide array of positions ranging from romantic

idealization of pre-modern society by dismantling all institutions in a way to build an eco-anarchical society to decolonial and feminist movements.

The degrowth imaginary has attracted increasing attention in recent years. However, it is often criticized for being ambiguous and difficult for the general public to understand. As a result, it is accused of "frightening people" (Drews & Antal, 2016). Since its rebirth in 2008, degrowth has developed into an umbrella concept. It draws insights from various scientific disciplines (Zozuľaková, 2016: 186). The idea of degrowth has become increasingly prevalent in both public and academic spheres. As a result, extensive research has been conducted on examining its origins, historical development, and broader implications (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Kallis et al., 2020; Liegey and Nelson, 2020). This research trend fuels the debate around the intellectual position of degrowth that extends across both reformist and radical strands of political thought. In the reformist camp, Strunz and Bartkowski (2018) detects degrowth of having an anti-modern and anti-democratic stance. They suggest a more inclusive form of liberal degrowth that remains fully committed to liberal democracy without radical transformation of society. Similarly, Saito (2024) identifies a reformist strand in the degrowth movement that reflects the principles of degrowth capitalism.

Contrary to reformist position, the scholarly examination of degrowth from a radical perspective is categorized into two main intellectual camps. The first group of scientific publications examines the contradictions inherent in the production and consumption patterns of capitalism. In these studies, degrowth is used as a theoretical lens for criticizing large-scale urban and mining projects (Nelson et al., 2019), designing alternative eco-cities (Florentin, 2018; Kronenberg et al., 2024), revealing the detrimental consequences of high-carbon tourism (Andriotis, 2018; Fletcher et al., 2019), establishing social policies without economic growth (Koch, 2022; Seidl and Zahrnt, 2015), analyzing agri-food systems (Lara et al., 2023), and criticizing mainstream development programs (Daniel and Neubert, 2024; Escobar, 2015). The other intellectual camp explores the potential of the degrowth imaginary to discuss alternative socio-economic futures (García et al., 2017; Kostakis and Bauwens, 2014; Stuart et al., 2021). They underline the unsustainability of current environmental politics and call for a radical transformation of society. It is stressed that the degrowth imaginary carries potential for establishing political alliances with various social movements. In the cases of Buen Vivir and the Environmental Justice Movement, degrowth is utilized for prioritizing alternative development models, amplifying the voices of marginalized communities in the Global South, and advancing the transition to a decarbonized society (Burkhart et al., 2020; Ellwood, 2014).

Aligning with the second camp, this paper acknowledges that degrowth and capitalism cannot exist together. This study considers the degrowth imaginary as

a recent and novel candidate for the left political spectrum. The main objective of this research is to examine the ramifications of post-politics, emerging from the transformation of neoliberalism, in environmental politics. It does so by assessing the political repertoire of the degrowth imaginary as a means of envisioning a post-capitalist future. The study is guided by the following research question: What is the political position of the degrowth imaginary in environmental politics, where a post-political consensus conceals discussions of the 'alternative'? This paper considers degrowth imaginary as a candidate for building an alternative socio-economic future as a way out of the current impasse.

As knowledge production in the social sciences accelerates, literature reviews have become increasingly important as a research methodology. Review studies are well suited for examining the state-of-the-art in a particular field or topic. They also contribute to theory development (Snyder, 2019: 333). Designed as a review study, the paper investigates the impasse in environmental politics by drawing insights from post-political scholarship. I argue that post-politics is useful for examining why social transformation has been downgraded in contemporary society, where individual transformation through the reinvention of bodies, careers, and places is highly valued (Elliott, 2021; Sennett, 2006). I contend that the implications of post-politics spill over into environmental politics. Although it may be argued that the environment has been at the center of policy debates for some time, realizing required policy adaptations for adequately addressing the ecological crises, including large-scale societal transformation, is rarely discussed in the public sphere.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section introduces post-political theory and the recent transformation of neoliberalism. The second section examines the expansion of the post-political ideals into environmental politics and considers sustainable development as a symptom of this post-political condition in the environmental arena. The final discusses degrowth by drawing insights from its historical development, political strategies, and position within environmental discourses for evaluating the current condition of alternative politics.

1. POST-POLITICAL DIAGNOSIS OF THE RECENT TIMES

We are living in extraordinary times. The sources of these extraordinary times range from food crises and mega pollution to developments in biogenetics and nanotechnology (Elliott and Hsu, 2016; Levy, 2005; Žižek, 2011; Diamond, 2005). Also, confronting devastating issues that threaten humanity (Robinson, 2014: 1), the triple crises of legitimation, accumulation, and climate change (Mueller and Passadakis, 2010), and the living experiences in entertainment and catastrophic societies (Elliott and Turner, 2013: 163) are other notable examples. As the likelihood of planetary collapse increases, the concept of doomsday no

longer holds a solely religious meaning. It has become a likely possibility in our lives (Giddens, 2011: 228).

In reflecting on the extraordinariness of our times, the chain of arguments suggests that we are standing at the edge of a cliff due to the accelerating pace of environmental risks. While these scenarios are undoubtedly alarming, they should not lead us into a state of despair. It is because the crises of the physical world often spill over into collective imaginaries. When doubt and questioning arise from the crisis in collective imaginary, several inconsistencies hardwired to the hegemonic order may be revealed. It would create political capacity for designing alternative imaginaries. In this sense, the current historical conjecture offers an opportunity to envision a society grounded in ecological harmony and cooperation (Petridis, Muraca, and Kallis, 2015: 196).

Finding the lens of post-political theory useful for analyzing today's political impasse, this section unpacks neoliberalism and the post-political condition for closer examination. It begins with a brief overview of post-political scholarship and is followed by an examination of the recent transformation within neoliberalism. The section also explores how neoliberalism adopts an anti-political stance through the deliberate economization of social spheres. The ultimate consequence of this strategy, already visible in the marginalization of alternative socio-economic futures dismissed as irrational and utopian, has detrimental effects on environmental politics.

To comprehend today's post-political condition, it is essential to distinguish between the concepts of 'the political' and 'politics'. This distinction may appear unfamiliar or confusing as 'the political' is rarely used in everyday language. Setting aside its disciplinary divides between political science and political theory, and the empirical and the hermeneutical, the core of this distinction is about the ontological nature of politics. In daily use, politics is the only term that encompasses elections, demonstrations, and power relations. In other words, politics incorporates the established practices and norms governing and organizing society, including the beliefs and institutions of a specific political order. However, 'the political' is related to the fundamental and ontological nature of how politics is formed (Mouffe, 2013: xii). When we speak of post-politics, we are not referring to a phase that follows politics in a chronological sense. Politics, as understood in everyday usage, continues. The issue is that the ontological core of politics, that is, 'the political', is diminished. For this reason, politics is no longer grounded in contestation or the articulation of alternative visions but is instead reduced to the pursuit of consensus.

Post-Political Theory

In the vocabulary of post-political scholarship, scholars have introduced a range of concepts, such as post-politics, post-democracy, and post-ideology that are used interchangeably. Although the terms differ, their core meaning remains strikingly similar. They describe the structural transformation of the political terrain in recent decades (Crouch, 2004; Alikhani, 2017; Decker, 2004). There are two points on which post-political scholars agreed. In post-politics, the antagonistic dimension of politics (i.e., the dissent-producing machine of the political) is rejected in favor of consensual imaginaries centered on good governance and cosmopolitanism. Depoliticization strategies, which prioritize consensus and harmony, promote agreement and seek to avoid divisions resulting from political ideologies. In addition, post-politics is associated with the decay of democratic institutions and the growing reluctance of citizens to participate in political action (Ritzi, 2014: 171).

Post-political theory has been criticized for its conceptual ambiguity, as it employs a range of concepts to explain political deadlock in contemporary times. Specifically, there are multiple interpretations of what constitutes 'the political' among leading intellectual figures. For example, Hannah Arendt reserves the concept of the political for the sphere of freedom. Arendt defines freedom as the condition in which collective groups are provided with a suitable political environment that enables them to articulate their own understanding of the socio-political order. In contrast, Carl Schmitt emphasizes the conflictual dimension of the concept (Mouffe, 2005: 9). However, Schmitt's focus on conflict does not imply a society torn apart by violence. Instead, it suggests that a functioning democracy relies on the open expression of dissent among political adversaries. Although the literature on post-politics contains certain ambiguities, I argue that it particularly offers valuable insights into the visible depoliticization of contemporary politics. In other words, post-political scholarship is especially important in revealing how socio-political rifts are masked by consensus-based governance that ultimately results in the foreclosure of alternative futures (van Puymbroeck and Oosterlynck, 2014: 87). Therefore, the relevance of post-political theory lies in its capacity to expose anti-political mechanisms that continuously disallow the emergence of alternative social imaginaries (Metzger, 2017: 180).

Post-political scholarship originates in post-foundational thought in philosophy. The emergence of post-foundationalism in political theory coincides with the height of postmodern and poststructuralist movements. Drawing insights from these intellectual schools, post-foundationalism places itself opposite of foundationalism. This distinction is largely rooted in the crisis of foundationalist thought that is represented by positivism and economic determinism. Foundationalism treats conceptual explanations of society at a given time as fixed,

unchanging, and external to historical context (Marchart, 2007: 11). Reflecting the foundationalism/anti-foundationalism debate, post-foundationalism challenges the philosophical claims to totality and universality embedded in grand narratives (2). However, post-foundationalism should not be equated with anti-foundationalism. While anti-foundationalism seeks to eliminate all grounds for constructing a political project, post-foundationalism accepts that no final or seamless ideological unity within society exists. Instead, the permanent presence of social division and antagonism is welcomed (3). The intellectual camp of post-foundationalism, particularly those scholars who engage with 'the political', is represented prominently by Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, and Slavoj Žižek (Metzger, 2017: 181). In addressing the current political impasse, Mouffe adopts the term post-politics, Rancière uses post-democracy, and Žižek prefers post-ideology. The next section briefly examines their contributions to post-political scholarship in turn.

In detecting historical origins, Mouffe traces the concluding period of the Cold War. In this period, government authorities started to strongly oppose socialist planned economies and have embraced the principles of representative democracy, cosmopolitanism, and good governance. These principles are different manifestations of the "anti-political", a term she uses interchangeably with post-politics, as they dominate public discourse (Mouffe, 2005: 1–2). Post-politics' presence became especially visible when transformatory changes in modernity started to take place. In the second stage of modernity, as described by Beck and Giddens, individualization gained momentum and political struggles formed around collective identities were downgraded. In a way, individualized politics contains only small-scale actions without generating societal transformation. The sources for establishing collective identities were limited only to domains of life-politics and sub-politics, which are roughly examples of individualized politics (48). From the perspective of social theory, the harbingers of the post-political are related to broader societal transformation from industrial society towards risk society. The change dislocated instrumental rationality from the constituting element of historical progress. The new vocabulary instead included reflexivity and "side-effects" (36). Once the motives of social change were identified as unplanned and spontaneous in character, the narratives of political ideologies, such as Marxism, were no longer relevant. After alternative socio-economic futures were disbanded from the political scene, neoliberalism filled the political vacuum. Neoliberalism has sought to transcend the contentious realm of ideologies (2). Acknowledging antagonism as fundamental to social interaction, Mouffe argues that the promise of 'the political' to generate dissent and alternative imaginaries is increasingly diminished, particularly under neoliberal democracy.

Turning attention to the intellectual origins of the post-political vision, Daniel Bell's thesis of post-industrial society, Francis Fukuyama's end of history, Ulrich Beck's concept of reflexive modernity, and Anthony Giddens' idea of post-tradition are notable examples (Mouffe, 2005: 35). As an intellectual project, anti-politics seeks to create a world in which the traditional division between the Left and Right is eliminated. This post-political vision undermines the foundations of collective action by rejecting ideological divisions within society. It is significant because socio-political ideologies are among the key factors for explaining processes of social change (Becker, 2020).

For the conceptual account of post-politics, Mouffe introduces several key concepts. In her vocabulary, the pair of antagonism and agonism appears alongside the distinction between politics and the political. The former refers to the maintenance of order through institutions, norms, and practices, whereas the latter denotes the ontological dimension through which politics is constituted in society. On the other hand, antagonism is a universal phenomenon and a constitutive element of the political. For Mouffe, antagonism, the conflictual dimension, is essential for mobilizing emotions and fostering collective identification in the formation of political identities (2005). However, in antagonistic politics, political actors perceive opposing views and socio-economic imaginaries as enemies. In this view, the antagonistic struggle, framed as a life-or-death confrontation, must be transformed into agonistic politics. In agonism, political actors do not deny the legitimacy of others' interpretations of socio-economic relations or their right to establish hegemony. Within this framework, alternative visions of socio-economic futures and the formation of collective identities are realized through agonistic engagement. In antagonistic politics, the political actors view opposing opinions and socio-economic imaginaries as enemies. For Mouffe, antagonistic struggle, a fight for life and death, does not create secure spaces for collective groups' demands as they will face repression. Antagonistic politics needs to be channeled into agonistic politics. In agonism, political actors do not put into question others' interpretations of socio-economic relations and the right to establish hegemony. Alternative interpretations of socio-economic futures and collective identity formation are realized fully in agonistic politics (Mouffe, 2000).

Although silencing the antagonistic dimension of 'the political' reduces the possibility of imagining alternative futures, Mouffe is not pessimistic about socio-political transformation. For Mouffe, the social universe is inherently pluralistic as competing imaginaries are both legitimate and necessary for the functioning of a democratic society (2005: 10; 2013: 2). As a result, all socio-political orders are contingent and necessarily involve forms of exclusion. Deliberate efforts to dismiss alternative imaginaries as radical or irrational merely reflect the temporary stabilization of hegemonic power and the contingent nature of political order

(2005: 2; 2000: 104). Therefore, the political impasse of neoliberal times can be only addressed by establishing counter-hegemonies, as they expose the limitations of any hegemonic order.

Jacques Rancière is another key intellectual in post-political theory. He examines the post-political condition under the concept of post-democracy. Rancière argues that the public is led to believe that the era of ideological divisions, antagonisms, and utopian thinking has come to an end (1995: 3). For him, this is in parallel with the fact that contemporary societies are increasingly retreating from politics (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014: 12). In the post-political condition, political configurations are increasingly dictated by the Centre. The Centre is a constitutive space that organizes politics without recognizing the demands of collective groups (Rancière, 1995: 6). In a way, the government of the Centre refers to politics without politics. Rancière contends that there are two forms of "endism" leading the political deadlock. The first endism is about hope. When hope disappears, there may not be any incentive to offer alternative imaginary but glorifying the present. The other endism is about political divisions. Without ideological references to offer different understandings of justice and inequality is not possible (7–8). In a broader sense, the gradual decline of politics corresponds to loosening the connection between individuals and collectivity as a source of political mobilization.

A key feature of post-democracy is the implementation of repressive strategies that undermine the rights of marginalized groups to assert their existence. For him, this strategy is critical for post-political governance. It is because these groups' demands carry the potential to challenge the post-political condition (Rancière, 1999: 29–31; Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014: 12). Thus, Rancière places particular emphasis on the articulation of alternative socio-political imaginaries. A properly functioning political process enables the public to confront dominant imaginaries through demonstrations, strikes, and the creation of alternatives.

For more comprehensive analysis, Rancière introduces a distinction between the political and the police. Unlike Mouffe, Rancière reserves the political, which is antagonistic dimension of politics, for the principle of equality rather than for conflict. The police, by contrast, refers to the general structures of governance whose primary function is to naturalize and stabilize the social order. As the post-political condition emerges through the police's repression of the political, Rancière identifies three primary tactics: archi-politics, meta-politics, and para-politics (1999: 61–93). For him, these tactics distort the true meaning of politics. Archi-politics can be traced back to Plato's philosophy, which envisions society as a seamless organism. A truly united society is only possible by silencing radical imaginaries. Rancière uses Plato's narrative of the three metals to illustrate

individuals who are fully aware of their roles within society in harmony and are discouraged from challenging their positions (Rancière, 1999: 65). Rousseau's concept of general will can be thought of as another example of archi-politics. The strategy of para-politics seeks to design political institutions to guide social harmony. For example, in contractarianism, individuals surrender their power to a socio-political order to avoid conflict. Meta-politics, in contrast, subordinates political action to a deeper essence such as an overarching theoretical framework or a grand ideology. Marxism and neoliberalism are examples of meta-politics, as they treat political action as an extension of grand theory (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014: 13; May, 2008: 44–45). In addition, para-politics and meta-politics do not assume a completely organic society unlike archi-politics. Instead, they accept the divided character of society as the product of rational individual choices (van Puymbroeck and Oosterlynck, 2014: 14). Overall, In Rancière's thought, post-politics seeks to obscure all forms of disagreement while preserving the status quo.

Another strand in post-political scholarship is represented by Slavoj Žižek. He uses post-ideology to describe the foreclosure of the political. Žižek contends that alternative imaginaries are not only suppressed but also actively foreclosed in contemporary times (1999: 198). For him, political ideologies have constituted valuable reservoirs for the conceptualizations of equality and justice, which is, in turn, crucial for articulating different socio-economic visions. Political ideologies have also played a crucial role in facilitating social activism and mobilization. Žižek believes this account of politics is no longer valid. In a post-ideological world, ideological divisions are excluded altogether. It is because consensus politics prioritizes economic logic and seeks to establish a technocratic mode of governance around social harmony (303). Žižek, affirming Mouffe, argues that Tony Blair's New Labour project in Britain was one of the most prominent examples of post-politics. New Labour policies sought to dismantle all forms of traditional ideological divisions in favor of embracing pragmatist economic ideas without considering justice and equality (199). Moreover, Žižek finds two recent examples of the post-ideological condition in techno-populism and ultra-politics. Techno-populism is an illustrative case that the long-standing conflict between liberal democracy and right-wing populism has been transformed into a peaceful coexistence in a way to dislocate antagonism from the political scene (Žižek, 2023: 5). Depoliticization through ultra-politics, a fourth to Rancière's tactics, on the other hand, reinforces consensus politics by silencing alternative voices and imaginaries. Political projects for social transformation are dismissed as marginal, irrational, and dangerous to the unity and harmonious character of society. At its core, ultra-politics operates under the assumption that society is inherently harmonious (van Puymbroeck and Oosterlynck, 2014: 14). Especially, the free movement of capital and labor is considered a potential enemy of this perceived

social harmony. Žižek notes that the Left's alignment with consensus politics creates space for populist right-wing movements to gain momentum.

The unifying credo in these examples is that they refer to radical depoliticization of the economy. The depoliticization strategy frames the economy as an institution outside of history and devoid of conflictual dynamics. When the economy is considered without historical lens, the laws of capitalist mode of production are believed to be ever-present and are not subject to change (Marx, 2008: 197). In this context, Žižek claims post-politics undermines the founding elements of acting politically. In other words, post-politics refers to the diminished capacity of the public for demanding socio-political change (Offe, 1996: vii). As Derrida reminds us, the depoliticization of the economy needs to be challenged to reveal its entanglement with history and culture (1981: xvi). Therefore, re-politicization of the economy is essential to challenge ultra-politics and escape the post-political condition.

Recent Metamorphosis of Neoliberalism: Post-Political Neoliberalism

Do we live in anti-political times (Schedler, 1997)? More fundamentally, what do we understand by politics? Is there a flaw in the way we think and act politically? These questions have placed the nature of political action at the center of debate since Ancient Greece. However, these inquiries have become an even more pressing issue under neoliberalism due to the expanding economization and militarization of society (Taşkale, 2016). It can be argued that a recent interest in studying politics coincided with the popularity of academic literature on post-politics, anti-politics, and depoliticization (Dunlop et al., 2024; Stoker, 2006). These studies offer important theoretical and conceptual insights into the changing character of political life.

Although the complexity surrounds the conceptual field, anti-politics refers to growing disillusionment with the institutions of the liberal democratic state. It is often expressed through the rise of populist movements around the world (Fawcett et al., 2017). In contrast, post-politics is characterized as a socio-political condition in which neoliberal consensus policies are implemented. There is a growing consensus in the literature that both forms are consequences of depoliticization (Dunlop et al., 2024: 320). The logic and instruments of post-politics deliberately aim to implement economization in various spheres of social life. It is argued that post-political neoliberalism is one of the central reasons for the current impasse in politics resulting in economization through depoliticization (Madra and Adaman, 2013).

Since its introduction, one of the core tenets of the neoliberal program has been the minimization of the state's role in allocating resources across society.

Moreover, neoliberalism, as an international project, has aimed to organize the world around the ideal of protecting capitalism (Slobodian, 2018). It can therefore be argued that the neoliberal project actively shapes the socio-political configuration surrounding it, rather than adopting solely a defensive stance. In other words, neoliberalism seeks to recalibrate how we think about the world in political terms.

The neoliberal paradigm has undergone several stages of evolution. It has consistently placed markets as a *sine qua non* for delivering optimal outcomes in society. The recent stage with financialization corresponds to a particular form of neoliberalism (Palley, 2013). Financial markets are assigned a central role in the allocation of resources and the accumulation of capital within the framework of financial neoliberalism (2). At its core, the philosophical foundation of financial neoliberalism lies in its effort to reduce all forms of exchange value to financial instruments (Adaman and Madra, 2012). In the twenty-first-century neoliberal capitalism, scholars have been examining how post-politics becomes integrated into the public sphere (Taşkale, 2016; Lang, 2016). Increasing spheres of social life have increasingly been permeated by economic rationalities in financial neoliberalism (Davies, 2014: 244). This trend is articulated through various processes such as marketization, privatization, entrepreneurialism, and the gradual economization of everyday life (Agenjo-Calderon, 2022). It ultimately deprives the public of any socio-political imagination that exists outside market relations. As a result, intimate notions such as individual happiness, career success, and personal self-worth are increasingly shaped by economic rationality (Weeks, 2011).

Post-political neoliberalism refers to the substitution of politics with economics (Taşkale, 2016: 2). In this context, the traditional mode of social conflict based on ideological divisions is gradually displaced from the political sphere. Instead, social relations are increasingly framed as inherently harmonious. The economic measurement of the 'good life' renders the dissent-producing machine of 'the political', in other words the antagonistic dimension, obsolete. Furthermore, the public becomes increasingly skeptical about the possibility of radical social transformation (Taşkale, 2016: 3). As imaginations of alternative societies are marginalized, the role of political spaces for contestation for implementing utopian visions is significantly diminished.

Technocratic mechanisms and institutional frameworks fail to interrogate the logic of free-market economics (Lang, 2016: 21). In turn, the gradual marginalization of collective imaginaries and alternative policy proposals from the political sphere have been gaining momentum with the spread of post-politics. In this novel post-political constellation, the nature of social interaction is assumed to be harmonious. As a result, the public sphere is conceived without engaging

with the real meaning of politics. The authentic meaning of politics involves confrontation between collective identities. However, post-political neoliberalism seeks to establish a form of politics that excludes the formation of collective imaginaries as carrying an intrinsic potential to challenge hegemonic power.

Fundamentally, the post-political dimension of neoliberalism guides socio-political life through technical rationality (Taşkale, 2016: 3). This strategy promotes the rationalization of social life through what can be termed as statistical logic. The rise of the quantified self who is constantly engaged in measurement, self-monitoring, and control, is one example of the dominance of statistics in individual life (Han, 2017). In politics, this trend is reflected in the rise of technocratic policy experts who govern specific issues. Adhering to ideals of economic rationality, measurement, and statistical logic, technocratic rule is treated as unquestionable. Provocatively, the post-political condition represents the epitome of the end of conventional politics (van Puymbroeck and Oosterlynck, 2014: 2).

2. THE POST-POLITICAL CONDITION AND ENVIRONMENT

Towards a Conceptual Framework of Post-Political Environment

The implications of post-politics as a novel face of neoliberalism have significantly reshaped environmental politics. As global environmental issues such as climate change, rising CO_2 emissions, and ocean acidification have gained increasing attention in recent decades, post-politics' spill over into environmental politics needs closer examination. There are two interrelated consequences of the fusion of post-political logic into environmental debates. They are the depoliticization of environmental politics and the marginalization of alternative imaginaries in public discourse. This section traces post-politics deadlock in environmental politics and considers sustainable development its representative ally.

Notably, Anthony Giddens argued that there is no politics of climate change (2011: 4). Policymakers, political parties, and non-governmental organizations are actively engaged in designing proposals, marches and demonstrations in reflecting the vibrant field of environmental politics (Urry, 2011: 91–92). Additionally, grassroots movements such as Climate Justice Action, a transnational coalition of environmental organizations, expose the insufficiency of market-oriented policies. This highly dynamic landscape of environmental politics may suggest that environmental issues are being politicized more than ever before (Swyngedouw, 2010; 2015). Still, Giddens' comment remains relevant in regard to the lack of meaningful societal transformation toward an alternative economic outlook. In essence, debates in environmental politics remain limited in their capacity to initiate profound societal transformation.

Post-political neoliberalism seeks to maintain the socio-political status-quo and foreclose discussions of the alternative. Its spillover into environmental politics reflects similar dynamics, since techno-managerial solutions are increasingly adopted in international and national policy circles (Swyngedouw, 2010: 214). Moreover, environmental problems are often reinterpreted through market logic to attract consumers. In contemporary times, ecological crises are increasingly being commodified and used as marketing tools (Cock, 2011). This trend is in parallel with that discussions of societal transformation remain marginal despite environmental degradation and the transgression of planetary boundaries are visible. This is because the current mode of politics has become an art of governance that avoids division and conflict (Diken and Laustsen, 2004: 99). In this context, the power of consensus politics dominates public discourse and suppresses radical and transformative imaginaries. For instance, Greenpeace and Alliance 90/The Greens are prominent actors in environmental politics, yet their strategies are largely limited to negotiation without engaging in radical contestation. This trend reflects the depoliticization of environmental issues under the post-political condition (Swyngedouw, 2010: 228).

The depoliticization of collective imaginaries persists despite the proliferation of apocalyptic scenarios stemming from the climate crisis, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels. Reflecting the hegemony of capitalism in policy and public discourse, economic logic is widely assumed to be part of the solution to environmental threats. As a result, the application of economic reasoning to social and environmental issues is encouraged in policy circles (Swyngedouw, 2010: 215). When the individuals' capacity to challenge the hegemonic order through 'the political' is foreclosed, neoliberalism's novel forms as economization and techno-managerialism consolidates (Diken and Laustsen, 2004: 219).

There are a number of defining characteristics of the post-political environment but four of them seem more relevant to my discussion in this study (Swyngedouw, 2010). First, individuals across different geographic regions do not perceive the ecological crises at the same level, although it is a global threat to humanity's existence. In reality, countries in the Global South are more vulnerable to ecological imbalances than those in the Global North. In other words, post-political discourse tends to obscure, and ultimately mask, these growing global inequalities. Second, the post-political condition reinforces the arbitrary separation between nature and human society, since it frames environmental issues primarily through a technical lens. This perspective neglects the mutual interdependence between ecological and social systems. Third, scientific discourse in environmental debates is often treated as neutral. As a result, technocratic decision-making by scientific elites may lead to depoliticization. Finally, the post-political environment increasingly serves as a reservoir for accumulation of power

for the elites. Eventually, it limits environmental responses to reformist policy measures (221-225).

Overall, the integration of post-political logic into environmental thought marginalizes conflicting and radical imaginaries. As mainstream environmental policies tend to prioritize consensus, business-as-usual approaches dismiss alternative socio-economic futures in the face of environmental degradation. After examining post-politics' fusion into environmental politics, sustainable development discourse represents a more concrete example of how consensus politics is consolidated.

Post-Political Sustainable Development and the Foreclosure of the Alternative

Sustainable development has become a central concept since its first introduction into scientific and policy agendas. It has emerged as a guiding principle in socio-environmental debates within international policy circles. The concept is often portrayed as an eco-rational strategy for building an environmentally sustainable society (Elliott, 2013: 1). Despite its popularity as a buzzword in our times, the concept remains contentious with ongoing disagreements about its practical and ideological implications. In light of the extensive critiques of grand narratives advanced by postmodern and poststructuralist thought, the prominence of sustainable development in policy discourse may even seem paradoxical (Meadowcroft, 2000: 370). Nevertheless, sustainable development is presented as a novel candidate for reconciling between the negative consequences of economic growth and the goals of ecological balance (Elliott, 2013: 16).

Tracing the historical development of the concept, the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987 marked a pivotal moment. However, the modern understanding of the term can be traced to earlier works such as *The Limits to Growth* by the Club of Rome, *Small is Beautiful* by E.F. Schumacher, and even *Principles of Political Economy* by John Stuart Mill (Purvis, Mao, and Robinson, 2019: 682; Carvalho, 2001: 62). The current conception of sustainable development is grounded in three pillars: economic, social, and environmental (p. 21). The economic pillar emphasizes the efficient use of resources; the social pillar focuses on meeting basic human needs and promoting social equity; and the environmental pillar seeks to maintain ecological balance and protect natural resources. Sustainable development carries a strong faith in the potential of economic growth to enhance living standards and preserve nature. The concept aims to reconcile continuous economic growth with environmental sustainability (Meadowcroft, 2000: 371). In doing so, sustainable development presents itself as the most feasible solution to the 'riddle of history', a dilemma between economic growth and ecological harmony, in environmental politics.

The transformation of sustainable development into an overarching concept that aims to unite economic growth with ecological harmony began with the Brundtland Report. The report framed economic growth as the primary path to achieving welfare. After constituting economic growth as a main pillar in preserving nature, Agenda 21 in the Rio Declaration shifted the emphasis placed on economic growth. The action plan adopted in Rio created a novel space for prioritizing market mechanisms for the goals of sustainable development. A neoliberal orientation is especially evident in the plan's recommendation that key actors should adopt an open and supportive international trade system.

Over time, the discourse of sustainable development became synonymous with 'fine-tuned growth policies'. International governmental organizations, national governments, and multinational corporations embraced the promise of sustainable development. In this context, scholars argue that sustainable development has evolved into a depoliticized project under post-political neoliberalism (Elgert, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2007). This is because the concept has been co-opted by neoliberal ideology and transformed into a form of greenwashing after the Rio Summit (Elgert, 2009: 375; Tulloch and Neilson, 2014: 32).

The evidence of sustainable development functioning as greenwashing is observable on multiple fronts (Lempert and Nguyen, 2013). Intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations, have increasingly functioned as platforms for advancing the special interests of states and lobbyists in designing favorable trade regimes. Furthermore, environmentalism is often employed as a rhetorical frame to justify superficial fixes to minor problems without prompting meaningful reform in the international system. As a result of short-term and self-interested agendas, sustainable development is now widely seen as being in "hijacked status" (4–5).

Integrated into the post-political landscape, sustainable development obscures the inherent conflicts and contradictions in the pursuit of perpetual economic growth. The increasing visibility of environmental problems is often framed through a technological lens (Clarke, 2008: 142). The reliance on science and technology is central to the discourse of sustainable development. For example, the Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 acknowledged that technology plays a crucial role in both defining environmental problems and generating solutions to them.

In this context, the growing emphasis on technological expertise has encouraged a shift in which the public increasingly delegates decision-making power to technocratic experts (Elgert, 2009). The rise of expert systems in political processes is a symptom of the post-political condition. At its core, sustainable development represents the manifestation of economization and the prioritization

of technological solutions in environmental politics. It promotes the belief that the adoption of ecologically sound technologies can produce win-win outcomes, solving environmental issues while generating new business opportunities (Fournier, 2008). In the current conjuncture, sustainable development addresses environmental challenges through a logic that aims to "sustain the unsustainable" (Blühdorn, 2007).

In a depoliticized world of post-politics (Catney and Doyle, 2011: 175; Chaturvedi and Doyle, 2015: 46), sustainable development embodies the principles of post-political environmental governance. It prioritizes consensus politics mainly through relying on techno-managerial solutions for reconciling economic growth with ecological balance. The result is limited public discussion of alternative socio-economic futures. In the post-political condition, the emphasis on "reasonable and manageable solutions" for protecting the environment (Fournier, 2008: 530) leads to the consideration of economic logic as the only savior (Kallis, 2015: 1). The subordination of nature to human will be evident in constant desire to expand material output is another manifestation of this trend (Rist, 2011: 24; Coetzee, 2007).

In line with Foucauldian thought, neoliberal reason has radically restructured the coordinates of reality that guide norms and behaviors (Brown, 2015; Dardot and Laval, 2017; Feher, 2018). The novel face of neoliberalism has colonizing aspects of life that were previously free from the logic of economization. Environmental politics has become one of the primary operating sites for economization through the tools of financialization valuation (Chiapello, 2015). When neoliberalism sets the scene for post-political ideals, environmental politics is completely cleared from its radical aspects. In this context, two implications of post-political sustainable development for environmental politics become clear. First, it can be argued that the primary aim of post-political sustainable development is the economization of the environment. The overarching environmental paradigm in the post-political condition establishes a strong connection between economic and environmental spheres. It promotes market-oriented solutions to mitigate environmental pressures created by economic activity in the capitalist mode of production and consumption patterns. This approach reflects neoliberal faith in market economies and in rationality as the basis for crisis resolution (Macgregor, 2014: 619). Illustrating how financial logic has colonized environmental policy, the Kyoto Protocol is framed as a blueprint for sustainable development in a way to create a space for the economization of greenhouse gas emissions (Chiapello, 2015). The formation of a market for gas emissions allowed businesses to measure and monetize the value of their impact on negative externalities. It also enabled them to better manage future investments as such calculations would be represented in company

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accounts. In other words, CO_2 emissions and environmental pollution were transformed into assets that could be owned and traded (Chiapello, 2015: 28–29).

Second, the current condition of environmental politics appears bleak under the expansion of post-politics. Eric Swyngedouw (2011) argues that sustainable development has become an "empty signifier." According to him, the term is used in a wide variety of contexts, ranging from city planning and transportation to harvesting (41). Under neoliberal conditions, sustainable development is capable of attaching itself to multiple meanings. Its lack of clear and fixed definition makes it difficult to establish the conceptual boundaries of the term. For example, the World Bank employs sustainable development as a marketing tool for advancing economic interests (Cervantes, 2013: 31). The 'liquid', or context-dependent, nature of sustainable development reflects 'anything goes' as a reminiscent of postmodernity. In a way, this elasticity allows the term to circulate widely without fundamentally questioning the status quo. Also, when consensus-driven politics becomes the norm, the scope of what is politically possible is deliberately limited both in national and international contexts to silence radical alternative imaginaries (Swyngedouw, 2007: 27). Sustainable development, as the dominant discourse of post-political neoliberalism, reflects Western values and conceptualizations of harmony and welfare (Catney and Doyle, 2011: 180; Latouche, 1996). Acknowledging its symbiotic relationship with post-political ideals, sustainable development becomes integral to the survival of capitalism (Tulloch and Neilson, 2014: 27). In the post-political age, it is necessary to offer better political imaginaries to adequately address the ecological crisis (Aschoff, 2015). These alternative imaginaries need to carry sufficient vocabulary to ensure politicization of the environment again. As a novel candidate, the final section of this study investigates the potential of the degrowth imaginary.

3. THE DEGROWTH IMAGINARY AGAINST THE POST-POLITICAL CONDITION

Two main points have been emphasized in the discussion so far. First, sustainable development has become a dominant discourse in the twenty-first century. The widespread belief in technological progress as the primary means of managing environmental problems has marginalized alternative socio-economic imaginaries in public debate. In this context, it is believed that modest institutional reforms will be sufficient to preserve ecological balance. Second, sustainable development's reformist framework does not guarantee the formulation of effective policy tools to address the ecological crisis. Nonetheless, the limitations of sustainable development and the broader unsustainability of neoliberalism remain poorly understood by the public (Baykan, 2007: 513). As the search for new approaches to environmental protection continues, the degrowth perspective has gained increasing visibility in recent decades. This section explores the

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historical evolution of degrowth, its political strategies for re-politicizing the economy, and its place within broader environmental discourses.

Unpacking Degrowth

The emergence of degrowth is linked to contemporary crises of modern society (Ariès, 2005), including climate change, growing inequalities among nations, the loss of affection for political action, and the erosion of ultimate meaning in life (Baykan, 2007: 513). At its foundation, degrowth emerged as a concept opposed to the growth paradigm, for which economic growth is pursued for prosperity. More specifically, the central tenet of degrowth lies in its critique of the desirability of growth policies in the field of economics (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis: 11). Considering degrowth's intellectual roots in different schools of thought as well as its recent surge in intellectual circles, the term carries some level of ambiguity. Integrating ideas and methods from different disciplines such as economics, philosophy, social theory, and political ecology leads scholars to consider degrowth as an umbrella term (Zozul'akova, 2016: 187).

Degrowth derived from the French term *décroissance*. The explicit meaning of the concept denotes reduction or decline. The concept's first and original use appears in the work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (Baykan, 2007: 514). The introduction of degrowth alongside new epistemological principles is necessary, Georgescu-Roegen argued, since the classical approach did not consider the laws of thermodynamics and biological processes (Missemer, 2017: 494). In contrast to classical economists, who based their models on physics, Georgescu-Roegen proposed an economy informed by biological insights. This alternative biology-inspired economic framework reveals that perpetual economic growth is incompatible with a planet of finite resources. Accordingly, Georgescu-Roegen framed degrowth as a logical response to the biophysical limits of the Earth (Baykan, 2007: 514).

The interpretation of degrowth varies considerably as its English translation remains contested. In a way for conceptual clarification, Ott (2012), offers a fourfold framework in which degrowth is described as a critique of GDP, a pathway to strong sustainability, an anthropological critique of growth, and a strategy for transforming the capitalist mode of production (573). Core interpretations of degrowth range from advocating a reduction in total economic output, often referred to as GDP degrowth, to more radical visions that promote a complete societal transformation toward post-capitalism (Van den Bergh, 2010). These competing narrow and broad definitions raise the question of whether degrowth ultimately necessitates a radical transformation of society. A narrow understanding focuses on reducing economic production and consumption levels to reach lower material output. In contrast, a broader definition calls for a

reconfiguration of the economy grounded in principles such as good living, social equality, and ecological harmony. While public discourse often equates degrowth with a decline in GDP in economy, more nuanced interpretations emphasize the need for a systemic economic transformation (Van den Bergh, 2010: 884).

Acknowledging its counter-hegemonic potential, the degrowth imaginary extends beyond a pure economic concept (Demaria et al., 2013: 191; Kallis et al., 2020: 1). It is about reducing the scale of economic activities and constructing alternative economic structures based on a new understanding of prosperity (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis, 2015). As a political project, degrowth aims to establish alternative norms and institutions in a way for complete structural reorganization of the economy (Kallis, 2015: 1–3; Demaria et al., 2013: 196). Because capitalist economies rely on continuous growth to maintain capital accumulation (Kallis et al., 2020: 27), the degrowth imaginary is, in essence, incompatible with the capitalist organization of the economy (Jackson, 2009; Kallis, 2015).

Degrowth and the Politics of Alternative

The presence of political parties and interest groups within institutionalized political structures explains some aspects of social change. However, a significant level of social change also stems from social movements. By making public demands visible, social movements can challenge existing political institutions through diverse strategies and repertoires aimed at initiating transformation (Coglianese, 2001: 85). Nonetheless, the presence of social movements is not enough for triggering societal transformation. Meaningful social change requires not only critique but also the presence of political will and coherent strategies among the actors involved. Effective political projects must formulate policy strategies and propose concrete approaches for managing change. Diagnosis of the current political and economic power relations and visionary outlook for the future are essential dimensions to any political project (Dobson, 2007).

The politics of alternatives is gaining momentum as we live in an age of crisis. Discussions surrounding the various manifestations of pessimistic scenarios increasingly refer to the role of capitalism. In this context, capitalism generates externalities as a consequence of its drive for capital accumulation. These externalities arise from excessive consumption patterns, deforestation, and so-called innovative production technologies. When such externalities emerge, capitalism tends to transfer the externalities to the periphery, particularly the countries of the Global South. However, the periphery has a limited capacity to absorb the environmental costs generated by the Global North's patterns of production and consumption. As this capacity diminishes, it becomes increasingly

likely that the environmental crisis will evolve into a broader crisis of capitalism and result in what Saito (2024: 29) refers to as a "global impasse."

In this context, I argue that the politics of alternatives today are largely centered on the environmental crisis and, more fundamentally, on the status of capitalism. Inquiries such as how we conceptualize the environmental crisis and whether it should be addressed by reforming or replacing capitalism depend on the perspectives adopted by different environmental movements. As the degradation of ecological balance becomes more visible and several planetary boundaries are crossed, environmental movements seem on the move. However, not all environmental movements share the same orientation. Some currents within these movements do not advocate for a radical transformation of society. Instead, they remain committed to the promises of economic growth.

Martínez-Alier (2002) identifies three distinct streams within environmental movements. The first, and oldest, is the cult of wilderness. This stream does not challenge economic growth and is rooted in the aesthetic appreciation of nature, primarily among environmentalist philosophers and scientists. Its advocates seek to separate between zones of economic production and nature in order to prevent environmental externalities from affecting natural ecosystems (4). The second stream, known as the gospel of eco-efficiency, takes a systemic view of the economy. The concept of "nature" is rarely used directly. Instead, the discourse centers on "natural capital." In other words, nature is valued only to the extent that it continues to provide commodities. The gospel of eco-efficiency incorporates the discourses of sustainable development and ecological modernization. It promotes win-win solutions that do not require abandoning economic growth or initiating social transformation (6). A related discourse, green Keynesianism, is considered the final stronghold of capitalism. Resembling a post-political mode of governance, green Keynesianism conceals the systemic irrationalities of capitalism and obscures structural inequalities through public spending and green investment (Saito, 2024: 32).

Amid the dematerialization narratives of capitalism, the environmentalism of the poor offers a radical alternative. This stream of environmentalism critiques other currents as technocratic and elitist. Receiving growing global attention, the environmentalism of the poor emphasizes the ecological distributional dimension of environmental conflicts (Martínez-Alier, 2002: 12). As a result, it focuses on the localized impacts of environmental degradation. This movement aligns itself with marginalized populations in the Global South, as they are more vulnerable to the detrimental results of economic activity in capitalist countries. Underlying ecological sustainability of local and Indigenous communities, the environmentalism of the poor links itself to broader environmental justice movements. Connected to the frameworks of Buen Vivir, Ubuntu, and Ecological

Swaraj, the environmentalism of the poor is considered central to the degrowth imaginary (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010).

The degrowth imaginary has a strong presence in both theoretical and practical domains. It incorporates political strategies drawn from the repertoires of both old and new social movements in order to challenge the current structure of the economy (Demaria et al., 2013). Given its potential as an alternative imaginary within environmental politics, I will draw on Erik Olin Wright's classification of social transformation in the first subsection and Dryzek's typology of environmental discourses in the following subsection. My aim is to demonstrate that degrowth, as a "missile word," offers crucial insights for envisioning alternative socio-economic futures and contributes to the re-politicization of environmental politics.

Political Repertoires of the Degrowth Imaginary

In his discussion of social transformation strategies, Erik Olin Wright (2010) identifies three distinct logics: ruptural, interstitial, and symbiotic. Ruptural transformation entails a radical break from existing socio-economic structures. This strategy seeks to establish complete novel institutions that diverge fundamentally from capitalism. Interstitial transformation involves the creation of alternative institutions outside the dominant capitalist framework without directly confronting the existing order. This approach emphasizes expanding the socio-political base of a movement. Finally, symbiotic transformation seeks to utilize state capacity by forming coalitions among political actors (305).

Aiming to establish an alternative society, the degrowth imaginary incorporates a variety of political strategies. These strategies are typically grouped under three categories of political engagement (Demaria et al., 2013). These forms of political strategies have connections with Wright's threefold discussion of social transformation strategies. The first category, oppositional activism, involves degrowthers' engagement in political actions such as environmental demonstrations, public rallies, boycotts of consumerist norms and acts of civil disobedience that challenge established institutions. Illustrating the individual level of oppositional activism, Enric Duran, who is often referred to as the 'Robin Hood of the Banks', is a notable figure within the degrowth imaginary. Duran obtained microloans from 39 banks and redirected the funds to anti-capitalist initiatives. In a way, he exemplifies a form of activism that directly contests the norms of capitalist institutions (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Cattaneo, 2013: 104; Parrique, 2019: 477). Oppositional activism aligns with Wright's concept of ruptural transformation. This strategy seeks to delegitimize and disrupt existing structures. In the degrowth case, these actions are typically undertaken by individuals and civil society organizations given the absence of an established

degrowth political party, these actions are typically undertaken by individuals and civil society organizations. Oppositional activism mainly focuses on raising public awareness rather than aiming for immediate societal transformation (Petridis, Muraca, and Kallis, 2015: 186).

Reformism constitutes another key political repertoire within the degrowth imaginary. The main insight of reformist strategy is completely in line with David Harvey's (2020) claim that contemporary societies remain heavily reliant on existing institutions for the provision of essential services such as healthcare, food distribution, and social security. From this perspective, dismantling functioning institutions without offering viable alternatives would not be feasible. Accordingly, degrowthers emphasize the need to preserve public health systems and social security mechanisms, while simultaneously working toward the replacement of capitalism (Demaria et al., 2013: 203). In the early phases of transformation, degrowth designs policy tools such as job guarantee schemes, universal basic income, and maximum income proposals as means to address social inequalities. Reformist strategies also include implementing resource caps to limit ecological degradation by imposing environmental taxes. Similarly, degrowth policies seek to restrict advertising, which is viewed as a driver of material consumption. Degrowth scholars highlight that advertising restrictions have been associated with improved individual well-being (Petridis, Muraca, and Kallis, 2015: 187; Hickel, 2020). Reformist strategy believes that the seeds of alternative society can be found within capitalism. For this reason, reformism within the degrowth framework corresponds to Erik Olin Wright's logic of symbiotic transformation, as it seeks to work within existing institutional structures.

Finally, building alternatives is considered a more intense form of confrontation than other approaches in the degrowth political repertoires. This is because initiating alternative transitions constitutes a serious challenge to capitalism by bypassing its institutions and potentially bringing its death (Trainer, 2012: 597). The degrowth imaginary is particularly rich in practices of building alternatives. Notable examples include various scales and forms of eco-villages, agroecology, Nowtopias, and transition town initiatives (Demaria, Kallis, and Bakker, 2019; D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis, 2015). For instance, Nowtopias are designed to foster post-capitalist values such as solidarity and collaboration. Urban gardening promotes sustainable food production within cities, while do-it-yourself repair shops embody the ethos of the sharing economy. Hacker collectivities seek to liberate digital technologies from the imperatives of capitalist logic (Carlsson, 2008: 183). Recognizing the volume and intensity of technological development in information and communication systems in several decades, degrowth is also visible in digital environments. For example, the concept of digital commons refers to online communities that promote universal access to freely shared

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knowledge. These initiatives aim to realize the ideals of sustainability and self-sufficiency (Petridis, Muraca, and Kallis, 2015: 187). Moreover, the strategy of building alternatives considers creating secure zones outside the cash nexus and wage labor in capitalism crucial. This strategy aligns closely with Erik Olin Wright's logic of interstitial transformation.

Degrowth and Environmental Discourses

Socio-political imaginaries and discourses cannot be understood apart from power dynamics (Dryzek, 2013: 10; Hajer and Versteeg, 2005: 175). The analysis of discourses necessarily brings political questions to the forefront (Hannigan, 1995: 53). This section employs environmental discourses as an analytical lens to better grasp the nature of contemporary environmental politics and the degrowth's position among them. Environmental discourses are narratives through which the world is imagined. On the one hand, they offer visions for initiating alternatives and mobilizing collective action. On the other hand, they contain assumptions about human–nature relationships, political actors' motivations, and key metaphors for socio-political outlook (Dryzek, 1988). Analyzing environmental discourses is therefore instrumental in understanding how political projects conceptualize society and the mechanisms of social transformation. Furthermore, the way discourses operate through language significantly shapes political actions. In this sense, environmental discourses draw the line of what is considered politically possible or impossible (Dryzek, 2013: 11).

There are several classifications of discourses in environmental politics. According to John Dryzek's classification, the most prominent environmental discourses are survivalism, sustainability, environmental problem solving, and green radicalism (Dryzek, 2013). To illustrate the nature of environmental discourses in this complex field, Dryzek suggests imagining a chessboard. This metaphor captures two key dimensions that help readers to position various discourses. The first dimension classifies discourses as either reformist or radical based on their relationship to industrialism. The logic of industrialism is defined as its claim that increasing material output signifies societal welfare. The second dimension concerns the means of addressing environmental problems. It distinguishes between prosaic discourses, which operate within existing institutional structures, and imaginative discourses, which seek to redefine those very structures. In other words, prosaic discourses accept the current order, while imaginative discourses aim to transform it entirely (Dryzek, 2013: 14). Where, then, does the degrowth imaginary fit within these environmental discourses? To answer this, I will compare degrowth with the sustainability discourse, which has previously been considered as a symptom of post-politics.

The sustainability discourse is reformist and imaginative. It comprises two main strands: sustainable development and ecological modernization. Both strands of the sustainability discourse maintain that the current economic system can address environmental challenges through green solutions without the need for radical societal transformation even though they acknowledge the contradiction between economic production and ecological balance. The sustainability discourse has a positive orientation in terms of the possibility of reconciling continuous 'economic growth, environmental protection, and justice' (Dryzek, 2013: 146).

Sustainable development is anthropocentric with respect to its ontological assumptions about nature. It prioritizes the sustainability of humanity rather than that of nature itself (158). Moreover, sustainable development is linked to organic evolution in terms of metaphorical framing. The organic metaphor envisions a life cycle that contains growth, development, and eventually death. However, in contrast to the finite growth in living beings, the discourse suggests that political and economic capacities can develop and expand infinitely (159). For this reason, the sustainable development discourse is closely aligned with the Enlightenment concept of progress. Sustainable development, in particular, reinforces faith in desirability and the need for economic growth policies. It relies on technological innovations and technocratic forms of policymaking to avert environmental catastrophes (176). Although, such techno-managerial approaches are symptomatic of the post-political condition.

The degrowth imaginary offers a fundamental critique of the sustainability discourse on several fronts. First, it argues that relying on market mechanisms and technocratic policy solutions is inadequate. Mainstream policy measures such as carbon emission limits, while necessary, are insufficient on their own. Second, degrowth proponents contend that the pursuit of continuous economic growth is unrealistic on a finite planet as the principles of thermodynamics and entropy demonstrate. In the reformist view, so-called environmentally friendly production is just a stage for the expansion of growth-oriented policies. The degrowth imaginary claims that carbon emissions are intrinsically linked to economic growth and the two cannot be decoupled (Hickel and Kallis, 2020). Therefore, degrowth positions itself as both radical and imaginative within the spectrum of environmental discourses by challenging the dominant language of capitalism.

4. CONCLUSION

A spectre now haunts the world again. It is not that of communism, but of ecological crisis (Levene, 2006). In contemporary society, nature is perceived as a mere extension of human prosperity and economic growth. While this anthropocentric view has prevailed throughout much of human history, the scale

and intensity of environmental exploitation have become unsustainable with the advent of capitalism as a dominant socio-economic order.

As a literature review study, the overall aim of this work has been to investigate how post-politics contributes to downgrading social and environmental transformations in contemporary society. For this aim, academic literature on post-politics and the degrowth imaginary are examined. The paper has made three key assumptions. First, the current political impasse stems from the post-political condition. In its transformation into post-political neoliberalism, technocratic ideals, social harmony, and consensus politics have become guiding principles of a new political configuration. Second, this post-political logic extends into environmental politics. The main actors in environmental politics mostly embrace post-political values, rather than designing radical political interventions. They adopt techno-managerial solutions to keep business as usual. In a way, the logic of such solutions echoes Friedman's call to mobilize "Father Profit" to save "Mother Nature" (2005: 244). Third, the degrowth imaginary offers a potential path out of this political deadlock. Its political repertoires incorporate elements of ruptural, interstitial, and symbiotic transformation strategies. Acknowledging that public discourse has long been colonized by orthodox economic ideas, the prospect of establishing new principles for an alternative socio-economic future is often dismissed as futile (Hayek, 1988: 63). The degrowth imaginary challenges this fatalism and carries the potential to become a political platform for articulating alternative future imaginaries.

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