Degrowth and the Unmaking of Capitalism: Beyond 'Decolonization of the Imaginary"

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Abstract

Degrowth is incompatible with modern capitalist socioecological configurations, and in fact requires their 'unmaking' to open space for post-growth and post-capitalist alternatives. The concept of 'decolonization of the imaginary' has captured an element of unmaking in the degrowth debate. However, this concept remains underdeveloped, and falls short of providing an analytical basis to understand the range of interconnected, multi-level, and multidimensional processes that make space for radical alternatives to modern capitalist socioecological configurations. This paper engages with literature from across the social sciences on various forms of deconstruction, destabilization, displacement, or unmaking of the social and socio-ecological order, most of which was previously unexplored in the degrowth debate. By building on that literature, this paper suggests a richer and more insightful approach to conceptualizing the unmaking of modern capitalist socioecological configurations, thus specifying and refining the notion of decolonization of the imaginary. This paper's insights are distilled in five propositions: (i) unmaking is a combination of situated processes; (ii) processes of unmaking involve both symbolic and material deconstruction; (iii) unmaking is a contradictory personal experience; (iv) unmaking is often hidden, but can be used strategically; and (v) unmaking is generative.

Keywords

Degrowth; socioecological transformation; unmaking; refusal; sacrifice; social practices; resistance; regime destabilization, crack capitalism

Introduction

It has become increasingly evident that modern capitalist societies engage in destructive modes of interaction with the natural environment. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource overconsumption, among others, are not simply remediable side effects, but characteristic traits of these societies (Jackson, 2016; Urry, 2010; Wilhite, 2016). Therefore, the possibility of pursuing transitions to meet global sustainability targets necessarily rests on challenging and transforming capitalist institutions, and their cultural, social and political architecture, including deeply held beliefs such as the inherent desirability of endless economic growth (see Feola, 2019 for an overview of the debate). The occurrence of the 2008 financial crisis has resulted in a broadening of the debate on the contradictions of capital (e.g., Harvey, 2014; Streek, 2014), and the conditions of post-growth and post-capitalist economies. This debate is now not only confined to academia, but more frequently features in the mass media and in institutional fora, including the European Union and the United Nations (e.g., The Guardian, 2018; Järvensivu et al., 2018).

One of the critiques and visions that has gained prominence in this debate is that of sustainable degrowth. Sustainable degrowth (degrowth from here on) envisions an equitable and democratic transition to a smaller economy with less production and consumption (Martinez-Alier et al., 2010; Schneider et al., 2010). It 'posit[s] a profound cultural, economic, and political transformation of dominant institutions and practices' (Escobar, 2015, p.454), and 'a disruption of existing institutional arrangements' (Joutsenvirta, 2016, p.23). Degrowth sets itself apart from the green economy, green growth and other agendas that compromise between the divergent objectives of sustainability and economic growth (Bina, 2013), as it proposes a project of urgent radical socioecological transformation that is incompatible with modern capitalism (Asara et al., 2013; Muraca, 2013).

As Boonstra and Joosse (2013) argued, by 'singling out economic growth as the cause of ecological and social misery, degrowth blames the inner workings and logic of capitalism, since economic growth is the single mechanism that holds the capitalist economic system together' (p.172). The post-capitalist nature of degrowth should be put into perspective —for example, distinct narratives of socioecological transformation focus not necessarily on capitalism, but on the State, or on the ideology of development (Böhm et al., 2008). Yet, many scholars and activists have variously supported this position (Muraca, 2013; Kallis et al., 2018). Notably, the incompatibility of degrowth with modern capitalist societies has been reflected in concepts of 'escape from the economy' (Fournier, 2008), 'deconstruction of the economy' (Leff, 2010), 'decolonization of the imaginary' (Latouche, 2015b), and other frameworks advocating the liberation of society from pervasive economicism and 'from the ideology of a one-way future consisting only of growth' (Le Guin, 1982, cited in Kallis and March, 2015).

Liberation from capitalist ideologies of growth is critical for degrowth. This fundamental principle is reflected in the ongoing debate on the definition of this term and the appropriateness of its usage. Various scholars have decried this term as being analytically misleading (van den Bergh, 2011), and unlikely to be appealing beyond the small niche of radically committed sustainability scholars and activists (Drews and Antal, 2016; but see Drews and Reese, 2018). Nevertheless, Kallis (2011) defended the value of the prefix 'de-' in degrowth:

> the English prefix 'de-' represents better the active nature of this liberation process: we have to get rid of the imperative of growth, institutionally and mentally, it won't go away just by ignoring it. The 'de' in degrowth is therefore not only a 'de' for throughput decline, but also a 'de' for cultural and institutional decolonization from economicism and the religion of growth (p.877).

Therefore, degrowth 'is a deliberately subversive slogan' (Kallis et al., 2015, p.5; also see Kallis and March, 2015).

However, although proponents agree that the liberation from modern capitalist imaginaries and institutions is an inherent condition for the realization of degrowth, it is unclear how this transformation might occur. I concur here with Joutsenvirta (2016), who argued that whereas the degrowth scholarship has been particularly strong in its critique and normative envisioning, its analysis of the changes required to implement degrowth proposals remains underdeveloped. In order to fill this research gap, Kallis et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of understanding policies such as ad-free cities (Mahdavi, 2015), or existing realizations of communities experimenting with non-capitalist practices[1] (Carlsson and Manning, 2010; Wright, 2013; Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016; White and Williams, 2016; Muraca, 2017a). Such pervasive 'alternatives in the here and now' (White and Williams, 2016) offer the opportunity to learn about the unleashing of new economic and socioecological imaginaries (Gibson-Graham, 2006), practices and institutions in socioecological transformations that are 'actually existing' in the interstices or at the edge of capitalism (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016; O'Hearn and Grubačić, 2016).

In this paper I contend that processes of unmaking captured by the notion of decolonization of the imaginary have not been adequately theorized in the degrowth literature. The concept of decolonization of the imaginary has highlighted the need for liberation from modern capitalist imaginaries at the expenses of more material and mundane dimensions of decolonization, or unmaking. Furthermore, despite the interest in already existing forms of convivial living without the imperative of growth, theoretical frameworks are still missing, which can help to understand how, when, and why imaginaries and other destructive elements of modern, capitalist societies can be (or are being) unmade to make space for sustainable alternatives.

This paper advances the theorization of socioecological transformation for degrowth by proposing and discussing the concept of 'unmaking': a diverse range of interconnected and multilevel (individual, social, socioecological) processes that are deliberately activated in order to 'make space' (temporally, spatially, materially, and/or symbolically) for radical alternatives that are incompatible with dominant modern capitalist configurations. This paper makes a threefold contribution. First, it draws researchers' and practitioners' attention to processes of 'unmaking', which are an often overlooked and largely undertheorized aspect of socioecological transformation, including in the degrowth scholarship. Second, this paper identifies relevant theories in a fragmented literature from across the social sciences which have yet to be mobilized in the degrowth debate. By bringing them into an interdisciplinary conversation, it also identifies those theories' productive tensions and complementarities. In doing so, thirdly this paper offers a novel and original way to think about the unmaking of capitalist socioecological configurations, as is necessary to realize degrowth; one which builds on the inspiring notion of decolonization of the imaginary, but which develops and enriches it substantially. This paper distils such novel conceptualization in five propositions, which sharpen our capacity to analyse existing processes of socioecological transformation such as those involved in a myriad of grassroots and community economies worldwide.

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[1] In this paper I will use the term 'community economies' to refer to diverse economic forms which are referred to in the literature, with some conceptual nuances, also as grassroots innovations (e.g. Feola and Nunes, 2014), nowtopias (Carlsson and Manning, 2010), real utopias (Wright, 2013), concrete utopias (Muraca, 2017a), among others. The term 'community economies', which I borrow from the diverse economies literature (e.g. Gibson-Graham, 2006), denotes spaces where diverse economic practices are performed, and where the ongoing process of negotiating our interdependence (with humans and non-humans) is situated.

Making and unmaking for degrowth

Recognizing the need to mobilize and enthuse the public through positive visions of the future, the narratives of sustainability of activists and academics alike have often privileged a focus on experimentation and innovation, sometimes at the expenses of a finer and more critical analysis of the necessary unmaking of existing configurations. Scholars and practitioners of sustainability innovations and transitions have long focused on the positive impacts of socio-technical innovations rather than the 'trajectories of erosion, decay, and fossilization [...] and [...] the loss or abandonment of previously important sociotechnical systems' (Shove and Walker, 2007, p.767). The emergence of innovations often implies the disappearance of older socio-technical arrangements, but the details of such declines rarely receive adequate attention (Shove, 2012).

In constructive contrast to those positions, the working hypothesis of this paper is that unmaking is not only necessary, but possibly pre-conditional for a socioecological transformation of the magnitude and nature implied by degrowth. The concept of decolonization of the imaginary and other theories discussed in this paper posit that social and socioecological change cannot be assumed to occur by automatic displacement of older configurations by novel frameworks, nor by moderation of environmentally and socially disruptive socioeconomic models through the incorporation of new values and imperatives into existing dominant configurations. The theories discussed in this paper converge on the fundamental principle that the conditions for social and socioecological change to unfold are variously conceptualized forms of rejection, refusal, disengagement from, or disruption of established configurations of institutions, values, power structures, and material infrastructure.

This paper does *not* suggest that unmaking is a sufficient condition for degrowth. Rather, it posits that the socioecological transformation to degrowth is characterized by a tension between the making of alternative socioecological configurations and the unmaking of established, unsustainable ones (in a similar fashion to the tensions discussed by Tsing, 2015). Community economies exist *against* (in opposition to) and *beyond* (as a prefiguration of alternative futures to) modern capitalist socioecological relations (Maeckelbergh, 2011; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). Capitalist ways of living and ways of 'living otherwise' both attract and are repulsed by one another in a dialectical fashion (Tsing, 2015). However, given the pervasiveness of capitalism, ways of living otherwise also necessarily exist *within* the dominant (albeit not monolithic) capitalist system that they need to overcome (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Wright, 2013; Darby, 2018).

In fact, some scholars have argued that community economies often unwillingly function as a flanking, compensatory mechanism for the inadequacies of the market society, which may support its persistence (Argüelles et al., 2017; but see Muraca, 2014). Some community economies may reproduce neoliberal principles and mentalities rather than transforming them, through sustaining reliance on responsible consumers and entrepreneurs, favouring the retreat from the State, naturalizing inequity, and reproducing unequal access to environmental goods and services (Argüelles et al., 2017). Furthermore, despite their theoretical incompatibility with capitalist socioecological relations, in practice, convivial, community economies often must compromise in order to consolidate alternatives (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). Yet, Darby (2018) showed that the tension between making and unmaking can be resolved without 'mission drift' through a dynamic and reflexive approach which has led, for example, grassroots community groups in Leeds, United Kingdom, to empowerment despite engagement with capitalism.

Therefore, the unmaking of capitalist institutions and practices would not *per se* ensure societal change toward sustainable socioecological configurations. The emergence and consolidation of spaces 'where people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social and economic organization' (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006, p.730) entails both destruction and

construction, resistance and experimentation, refusal and proposition. This tension between making and unmaking underscores the critical function of the latter in a non-binary, nuanced in-against-and-beyond character of existing attempts to realize and prefigure degrowth.

Decolonization of the imaginary and its critiques

Definition of decolonization of the imaginary

In the degrowth debate, the notion of unmaking has been largely captured by the concept of decolonization of the imaginary.[2] Proposed by Serge Latouche and since employed by numerous scholars and activists, the objective of the decolonization of the imaginary is a radical and profound cultural change of the foundational imaginary significations of modern, capitalist societies. Decolonization of the imaginary is a project of revolutionary magnitude that aims to 'de-Westernize' society: to uproot the dominant paradigm that both produces and is reproduced by the institutions, culture, psychosocial structure, and material infrastructure of modern, capitalist societies (Latouche, 2015b).

Building on Castoriadis' (1997a, 1997b) work,[3] Latouche emphasized the foundational importance of the imaginary signification of social reality. Drawing also on Illich (1975) and other anti-utilitarian scholars, he interpreted the foundational categories of capitalist systems (e.g. progress, technology, growth, development, economicism, consumerism) as elements of the imaginary that legitimize and inform the dominant growth-oriented, exploitative and unjust socio-economic system (Latouche, 2011). Decolonization of the imaginary entails critically challenging social significations that are taken-for-granted, as a necessary condition to make space for a convivial, just society living within biophysical limits. The decolonization of the imaginary is as a liberation from the social obligation to ever increasing consumption, the de-skilling caused by the ever increasing dependency on technology and the market, the illusion of freedom in a highly constrained market economy, and from a technical-productive system that is perceived as inevitable and optimal in the dominant paradigm (Latouche, 1995, 2011; also see Illich, 1975).

Autonomy, i.e. 'the ability to give laws and rules to ourselves independently and consciously' (Deriu, 2015, p.55; also see Castoriadis, 1997a), is central to degrowth and should not be confused with neoliberalism's principle of individualism (Deriu, 2015). Social collectives' autonomous determination of new imaginaries inform the rejection of capitalism's requirement for endless consumption, as well as the repudiation of economicism and the pervasive penetration of utilitarian rationality into any realm of social, natural and personal life (Illich, 1975). In this sense, Latouche's call for exiting the economy, a strategy already identified as crucial by Fournier (2008), advocates an exit from a particular and exceptional economic model that has pervaded society and rendered the market economy into a market *society*.

In his work, Latouche has illustrated decolonization of the imaginary through various examples of decolonization tactics and strategies, such as cognitive subversion, dissent, resistance, and deconstruction (critique) of economicism (2015b), as well as disobedience, defection, and boycott

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[2] It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the interconnections between decolonial and degrowth frameworks. For an overview of the former, please see Mignolo and Walsh (2018). For an accessible discussion of the relation between decolonization and degrowth thinking, see Deshner and Hurst (2018).

[3] Also see Asara et al (2013) for an insightful discussion of the divergences between Castoriadis and Latouche's intellectual positions.

(Latouche, 2011). Latouche described decolonization of the imaginary as a 'refusal of complicity and collaboration with [...] the ideology of development' (Latouche, 2011 (author's translation)). Such refusal is exemplified by abstention from the use of certain technologies, and the rejection or limitation of spaces allotted for advertisement. Latouche's (2015a) framework also emphasizes that natural and human-made disasters can offer windows of opportunity for creating awareness of the limits and disadvantages of current models of development, challenging those models, and/or rejecting and potentially even revolting against them. Finally, building on Castoriadis and again stressing the critical role of autonomy, Latouche (2011) proposed that the pathway to a new imaginary must involve reflexive political participation and direct democracy. Among the most significant challenges he identified is the difficulty to generate the radical change 'from within' that would result in a degrowth transformation.

Critiques of decolonization of the imaginary

Scholars have made three main critiques of the concept of decolonization of the imaginary. Firstly, this concept remains largely insufficiently theorized and underdeveloped. Our understanding of decolonization of the imaginary is piecemeal and largely based on sparse examples in which strategies such as dissent, resistance, and revolt have proved successful or promising in specific cases, times and locations as employed by some individual or collective actors (Latouche, 2011). Current research on grassroots movements and community economies have shed further light into our understanding of some of these strategies, including increasingly the importance of more oppositional practices (e.g., D'Alisa et al., 2013; Asara et al. 2015). But Latouche's focus on learning from disasters is problematic as it underplays issues of conflict and politics. Therefore, as argued by Kallis and March (2015), issues of multi-level (local-global) relations and the role of social conflict remain under-examined in decolonization of the imaginary (also see Foster, 2011).

Secondly, scholars have critiqued Latouche's (2010, 2011, 2015) emphasis on the cultural dimension of the imaginary for being analytically constraining, as it backgrounds the material, embodied, and enmeshed nature of capitalism as much as of alternative socioecological configurations (e.g., Leff, 2010). In an important distinction between Castoriadis and Latouche, the latter's treatment of the imaginary as 'pure abstraction […] misses the point that alternative degrowth significations should be established with alternative institutions' (Asara et al., 2013: 230). Latouche (2011) clearly recognizes the importance of concrete and material realizations of convivial sustainable societies, which he situates as one of three axes of the degrowth project alongside the radical critique of growth models and a political programme of transition. Latouche's position has been interpreted as leaning overwhelming towards actions such as 'cultural critique', building 'awareness', 'semantic cleansing', 're-evaluation' and 'reconceptualization'. Leff (2010) echoed by Fotopolous (2007), opposes such emphasis on this symbolic dimension, arguing that the

> really-existing economy cannot be deconstructed by an ideological reaction or a revolutionary social movement. It is not enough to moderate it by incorporating other values and social imperatives. Deconstruction entails practical measures, or we will forever stay at the purely theoretical level, striking blindly in the dark with our desires for a better and more sustainable world (p. 105).

For a more complete theorization of decolonization of the imaginary there remains the need to clarify the relations between the liberation from material and immaterial dimensions.

A third critique of decolonization of the imaginary concerns its failure to fully support 'a process-based understanding of utopia' (Kallis and March, 2015, p.364). Latouche's concept does not fully identify the mechanisms of change and therefore has been seen as presenting degrowth 'as an idyllic end state' (Kallis and March, 2015, p.364). However, such understanding of degrowth is largely

disconnected from the concrete experimentations of future-in-the-present that exist within- (and despite) the capitalist system (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; White and Williams, 2016).

For these 'alternatives in the here and now' the decolonization of imaginary is not only an end, but also a means, such that the decolonization of imaginary is a practice of everyday un-making (e.g., restructuring, resignification, contestation, resistance) of spaces of difference. For those people building alternatives on the ground, to decolonize the imaginary therefore is a never-ending process that involves inspiration, emotions, hopes, compromises, and conflicts at personal as well as collective levels; in sum, it entails the mundane but very concrete challenges experienced by citizens building autonomous spaces of alternative to capitalism (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). Although there is a need for a better understanding of those experiences (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006), decolonization of the imaginary does not appear to be a useful means of doing so, as it fails to theorize unmaking as a multidimensional process.

In sum, decolonization of the imaginary has been an inspirational concept that nevertheless has lacked analytical breadth and depth. As such, this concept has highlighted the need to unmake modern capitalist imaginaries while simultaneously constraining the thinking of unmaking. The concept of decolonization of the imaginary has likewise not provided an adequate analytical basis to understand how, when, and why imaginaries or other destructive elements of modern, capitalist societies can be or are being unmade to make space for convivial, sustainable alternatives. As argued elsewhere (Feola, 2015) a structured interdisciplinary dialogue around the potentials and complementarities of existing theories would lead to an improved understanding of socioecological transformations such as that proposed by degrowth. The remaining sections of this paper aim to generate such dialogue by contributing an interdisciplinary perspective to our understanding of decolonization of the imaginary and unmaking for degrowth.

Theories of unmaking across the social sciences

In order to appreciate the diverse forms that the unmaking of dominant capitalist socioecological relations can take, this section introduces six theories not currently mobilized in the degrowth debate, namely destabilization, transformation (of social practices), sacrifice, everyday resistance, refusal, and crack capitalism. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a full overview of these theories and their related literatures, and this section outlines only a minimal set of core elements of each theory. This social science scholarship has not been widely applied to questions of post-capitalist change, and does not offer an integrated theory of unmaking. Nevertheless, this literature provides different and complementary perspectives that enrich the conceptualization of decolonization of the imaginary and other processes of unmaking of capitalist socioecological relations.

Destabilization

Innovation studies have traditionally emphasized the emergence of novelty and the lock-in mechanisms that ensure the stability of given socio-technical systems, while largely neglecting the dissolution of old socio-technical regimes (Shove, 2012; Turnheim and Geels, 2013). Exceptions to this general tendency are Turnheim and Geels' (2012; 2013) studies of the destabilization of socio-technical regimes, in which these researchers conceptualize destabilization as 'the process of weakening reproduction of core [socio-technical] regime elements' (Turnheim and Geels, 2012, p. 35). Turnheim and Geels (2012, 2013) challenged the assumption that destabilization is an inevitable by-product of the emergence of novel socio-technical arrangements and focussed specifically on the process of destabilization, which they considered an 'unlocking'— a condition for the creation of space for innovation. Building on innovation studies, industrial economics, institutional theories, and

organizational studies, Turnheim and Geels (2012) conceptualized destabilization as a multidimensional process that involves changes in resources, legitimacy of a socio-technical regime, and enactment, commitment, and confidence in the regime's viability.

The notion of destabilization has a direct application to industrial innovation *within* the capitalist system. Studies of regime destabilization conducted within this context include examination of the energy and automotive sectors (Turnheim and Geels, 2013; Weyer et al., 2015). Consistently, theoretical frameworks of regime destabilization that comprise specific mechanisms (such as changing markets or competition) and actors (e.g., firms, regulators, or consumers), may have limited immediate applicability to studies of post-capitalism. In particular, the regime destabilization framework does not equip us well for understanding the deliberate rejection of pervasive economicism and foundational modern myths such as those postulating development and endless economic growth, which is a critical step to achieving degrowth. Nonetheless, as discussed in further detail in section 5, this literature has generated some valuable insights into possible mechanisms of unmaking.

Transformation of social practices

The framework of social practice theory proposed by Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012), offers another important perspective on processes of unmaking. This approach assumes that 'transitions are needed not only in the efficiency with which contemporary standards of living are met, but also in the bundles and complexes of practices of which daily lives are made' (Shove et al., 2012 p. 140). Such bundles include, for example, eating, showering, clothes washing, and house heating practices (Shove, 2010; Shove et al., 2012). Definitions of social practices include combinations of materials, competences and meanings (Shove et al., 2012, p. 7), or entities ('recognizable conjunction(s) of elements') and performance ('the immediacy of doing that fills out the entity and reproduces it'). This approach decentres individuals and considers them as carriers of practices rather than as deliberative agents (Chappells et al., 2011). The persistence of any practice depends on the existence of a possibly changing population of faithful carriers, i.e., people who perform a practice and thereby reproduce the connection between its elements across space and time (Pickerill, 2015).

Social practices emerge, persist, transform, or disappear over time through emergent processes. Such processes establish, break, and possibly reconfigure into novel combinations the new or existing elements of social practices (materials, competences and meanings). For example, social expectations of personal hygiene (e.g. daily showering) have changed over time in combination with changing combinations of elements such as new materials (bathroom technologies), and meanings (e.g. ideas of comfort and convenience) (Shove, 2010a). Changes in social practices in personal hygiene, like others related for example to mobility and eating, have reflected patterns of growing consumption which characterize most present day societies.

Importantly, Shove and colleagues stipulated that 'the arrival of new elements may lead to, and may in fact depend on, the demise of others' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 58). As the emergent result of complex processes, social practices are made and unmade in place-based processes of 'packing and unpacking' and mutual shaping of materials, competences and meanings, whereby some elements, or practices or complexes of practices (i.e., practices that link to one another in integrated bundles), must make space to accommodate others (Shove, 2012). The persistence of social practices sustains the linkages between elements over time, which is not a linear evolution, but rather an emergent process, i.e., an 'ongoing accomplishment in which similar elements are repeatedly linked together in similar ways' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 24).

Sacrifice

A group of political scientists and environmental studies scholars led by Maniates and Meyer (2010) have insightfully examined the concept of 'sacrifice.' Maniates and Meyer's perspective represents a departure from two common narratives about sustainability in wealthy consumer societies. On the one hand, some environmentalists have claimed that sacrifice is unnecessary because new technologies will enable us to address the flaws in current dominant lifestyles. On the other hand, others have argued that significant sacrifices are necessary but are unlikely to be achieved due to self-interest, apathy, or lack of motivation among consumers. According to Meyer (2010) 'these views share commonplace – yet misguided- assumptions about self-interest and citizenship, justice and efficacy' (p.13).

Maniates and Meyer argued that sacrifice must not be understood merely as the denial of self-interest or altruism (*to be* sacrificed), but rather should be considered as giving up something (now) for something of higher value (to be obtained now or in the future) (Maniates and Meyer, 2010). In this sense, sacrifice makes space for benefits that otherwise would be impossible, such that sacrificing something results in the re-composition of practices across one's everyday experience and beyond the specific and limited practice that is sacrificed, and possibilities are opened to 'pursue higher [non-material] purposes' that would have been otherwise out of reach (Princen, 2010, p.161). In other words, these critiques invite us to think about sacrifice as a politics of more, rather than less (Wapner, 2010).

To sacrifice consumption or environmentally damaging practices inherently involves a degree of self-limitation that challenges social expectations about 'rational' consumer behaviour. Those who sacrifice also reassert the agency to break down social expectations and open up to new possibilities that were otherwise unthinkable, such as prioritizing non-rational, anti-utilitarian, non-market based engagements with the self, with others, and with the biophysical environment. Sacrifice is the choice to affirm one's ability to do without something, and by so doing, to willingly take 'a potential avenue towards richer meanings of life itself' (Wapner, 2010, p. 36; Pickerill, 2015). While some environmentalists frame sacrifice as an heroic act, Maniates, Meyer and colleagues have convincingly demonstrated that sacrifice is not an exceptional act, but rather a very ordinary experience even within a relatively wealthy consumer society. Although sacrifice is often hidden by dominant narratives of plenty, people do sacrifice, such as in their role of caregivers. Willingly or not, they require others to be sacrificed to provide the goods and services they enjoy (e.g., clothing and devices made by cheap labour). The implication is that sacrifice is ubiquitous in everyday experiences, and the real question is not *whether* to sacrifice, but *what* to sacrifice, which evokes the ethical dimension of this behaviour.

Nevertheless, while Maniates and Meyer (2010) propose the perception of sacrifice as positive and hopeful, this act necessarily entails a loss, in that it means giving up something to live differently (Hall, 2013). A sacrifice is a means to achieve sustainability that involves a reconfiguration of social order and a redefinition of human nature and subjectivity, including the primacy of the identity of a consumer over that of a citizen, which can be disturbing and difficult to maintain. Hall (2013) argues that to recognize this tension between loss and hope is important, as it highlights sacrifice as a process marked by personal and collective decisions that are neither easy to make nor always consistent. Furthermore, agency often collides with institutional and material constraints (Williams, 2010), as substantive options are needed to configure the concrete possibility to sacrifice. Sacrifice represents an ideological challenge and ethical possibility that remains subject to technological lock-ins and material constraints.

Everyday forms of resistance

James Scott's (1985) landmark work on the 'weapons of the weak' drew attention to the everyday forms of resistance adopted by dominated classes or social groups to engage in anti-systemic

struggles when outright confrontation is impossible or too difficult. Without romanticizing such forms of resistance, Scott highlighted the importance of these everyday struggles, which tend to be overlooked at the expense of more outward, often less effective revolts or revolutions. What characterizes everyday forms of resistance is that they entail little or no coordination among people (being most often individual acts), represent forms of individual self-help, and avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or elite norms (Scott, 1985). Scott (1986) defined everyday resistance as 'any act(s) by member(s) of the class that is (are) intended either to mitigate or to deny claims (e.g. rents, taxes, deference) made on that class by superordinate classes (e.g. landlords, the State, owners of machinery, moneylenders) or to advance its own claims (e.g. work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis these superordinate classes' (p.22). Examples of everyday forms of resistance include sabotage, false compliance, footdragging, theft, gossip, slander, rejecting imposed cultural categories, withdrawal of reference, refusal to compete with other members of one's social group (or class), desertion, feigned ignorance, dissimulation, deception, and passive noncompliance (Scott, 1985, 1986).

Everyday forms of resistance are more prosaic and mundane than revolutions; they entail a constant struggle by relatively powerless groups. These practices have the effect of undermining policies without open confrontation. As such, they are, as Scott argued, particularly effective tools of resistance to the State. It is through everyday forms of resistance that the State feels the political presence of the mass population. In fact, it is because everyday resistance brings the struggle of the dominated on a different ground that the State's options for response may ultimately change or be narrowed (Scott, 1986; also see Ward, 1996).

Refusal

Over the past decade, the notion of 'refusal' has been the focus of renewed attention in cultural anthropology (McGranahan, 2016a). At a basic level, refusal constitutes abstention, saying 'no', a stoppage, or the breaking of personal or institutional relations (McGranahan, 2016a). As such, refusal is commonly perceived as an ending. Yet, refusal is also much more than negation, as evidenced by recent studies on refugees refusing to take up citizenship rights (McGranahan, 2016b), native people on borderlands refusing a 'half-life of civilization in exchange for land' (Simpson, 2016, p. 328), and Israeli men and women silently absenting from military service (Weiss, 2016).

McGranahan (2016a) suggested four main theses on refusal, each of which dispels long-standing narratives, provides a new reading of this notion, and thereby enlightens our understanding of the dynamics and the politics of refusal. First, while the common perception of refusal as an act of negation gives it a negative connotation, refusal can in fact be generative. To refuse, particularly when refusal is mostly directed toward the State, opens a new kind of political space.

Second, refusal is social and affiliative—to refuse is to reject some affiliations in order to reconfigure relations or enable other meaningful affiliations, even when the act of refusal is done individually. Therefore, refusal involves the removal or reconfiguration of attachments, connections, shared goals, and ambitions that represents 'an effort, at least minimally, to redefine or redirect certain outcomes or expectations or relationships' (McGranahan, 2016b, p.334).

Third, according to McGranahan (2016a), theories of resistance tend to overemphasise the role of the State. Although intellectually related to Scott's everyday forms of resistance (1985), refusal does not necessarily represent the complete repudiation of dominance or class struggle, but rather is a more radical form of critique. By abstaining from engagement, those who refuse in fact challenge the very legitimacy of the State, and thereby refigure social and political relations.

Fourth, refusal is not a passive and desperate act, but is rather wilful and hopeful (Simpson, 2016). Something is refused in the hope for something better, and the deliberate, hopeful act of refusal

creates a political alternative, which opens the possibility to generate change. In sum, refusal can be an affirmative investment of hopes and energies in another possibility (Simpson, 2016). In creating such political alternatives and new spaces of disengagement, refusal affirms an ethical affiliation (Weiss, 2016), and thus involves an investment in unlearning repertoires of activism that replicate conventional politics and building an alternative activist grammar.

Crack capitalism

Holloway's (2010a, 2010b) essays 'Change the world without taking power' (2010a) and 'Crack capitalism' (2010b) have been highly influential in the debates on autonomous spaces and post-capitalism. Holloway approaches the unmaking of capitalism by using the metaphor of the 'crack' in the system, which represents the act of saying 'no' to that economic philosophy and a refusal to comply with social expectations concerning ever-growing material consumption and capitalist appropriations of labour. In other words, the crack denotes the deliberate refusal to reproduce capitalist socioecological relations in the everyday experience of consumers and workers as well as broader exploitative structures. Holloway's work was informed by the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, and its novel approach to revolution, but in its turn, it has inspired and informed research and on-the-ground experiences of ruptures, refusals and disruptions of space (Occupy Movement, e.g. Halvorsen, 2015), lifestyles (radical ruralism, e.g. Wilbur, 2013), and understandings and practices of gender relations in a urban context (Siltanen et al., 2015), among other experiences of refusal-*cum*-creation of ways of being and doing 'other'.

The metaphor of the crack highlights the characteristics of processes of unmaking. Firstly, the crack starts from the local and the particular, which is the main locus of action. It is impossible to crack the system in its totality (as was the aim of past Marxist and communist movements) before creating alternative relations; however, it is possible to undermine specific elements of the dominant system in particular contexts. The crack is the opening up of spaces in-against-and-beyond capitalism, such as alternative and autonomous spaces of radical experimentation (Carlsson and Manning, 2010; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Maxey et al., 2015; Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016): the crack exists *within* capitalism, as there is no 'out there' to leverage the system in its totality, and a crack can unmake only some aspects of capitalism for a certain time. The crack allows alternatives to emerge that are *against* capitalism by their very nature, thus also prefiguring possible futures *beyond* capitalism. Furthermore, as the crack moves, it can connect to other cracks, which reflects the importance of connection and resonance across struggles and movements.

The crack can have spatial, temporal and resource-based dimensions. Importantly, cracks are context-dependent and the result of open-ended experimentation, which limits the transfer of lessons between contexts. Nevertheless, cracks share common principles of dignity, autonomy and responsibility, whereby dignity denotes the response of subaltern subjects to the subordination of people and nature to market and capital, and to the alienation of labour. Autonomy and responsibility imply taking direct action and refusing to delegate the realization of a better world to others via representative democracy or professional revolutionaries (i.e., revolution 'on behalf of').

Finally, cracks are agenda-setting because they open up spaces for otherwise unimaginable social relations and ways of thinking and doing, which they emphasize as a form of resistance against the homogenizing forces of capitalism. In other words, for Holloway (2010 a, 2010b), to crack capitalism means to reject rigid categories, classifications, and abstractions as expressions of modern rationalism and capitalist forms of domination, in favour of embracing diversity and horizontal relations such as cooperation, recognition, love and friendship.

Preliminary synthesis: Five propositions on unmaking socioecological configurations

The various theories on unmaking introduced above enrich, complement, and possibly revise our thinking about decolonization of the imaginary and the need to unmake modern capitalist configurations to make space for degrowth. To be clear, I do not argue that on their own, any of these concepts and theories can—or even should—replace the framework of decolonization of the imaginary. Rather, engagement with and reflection upon the complementarities between these concepts and decolonization of the imaginary reveals a more multifaceted process of liberation from dominant modern capitalist configurations. In this section, I make five propositions, which I discuss in turn: (i) unmaking is a combination of situated processes; (ii) processes of unmaking involve both symbolic and material deconstruction; (iii) unmaking is a contradictory personal experience; (iv) unmaking is often hidden, but can be used strategically; and (v) unmaking is generative.

Proposition 1: unmaking is a combination of situated processes

The first proposition posits that unmaking can best be understood as a combination of interconnected *processes*. These processes are activated to deliberately 'make space' for radical alternatives that are incompatible with dominant modern capitalist configurations. This notion enriches the concept of decolonization of the imaginary with a processual understanding of the concrete attempts to unmake modern capitalist configurations in existing experimentations of degrowth.

Deliberate acts of refusal, sacrifice, crack of, or resistance to symbolic or material elements of dominant configurations are central in the theories mobilized in this paper. These acts are not end points, but rather means inscribed in the performance of individual, social and socioecological transformation, which might or might not result in the unmaking of those configurations. The ontological position shared by most of the theories underpins a recognition of the processual, open-ended, and non-teleological character of unmaking. These theories conceptualize socioecological configurations and social order as the result of processes of production and reproduction that are never set. Stability is an ongoing accomplishment, and consequently, unmaking is always a possibility.

I posit that processes of unmaking are also historical and situated. Contingent combinations of internal and external forces may destabilize socio-technical systems. Whether conceptualized as power relations, socio-technical systems or bundles of social practices, social configurations have a history, as embodied or reflected in institutions, values, materials, competences and meanings, and they are fluid, such that existing integrations of elements influence emerging novel ones. Such path dependence constrains deliberate choices of living otherwise. Together with the diversity of forms of capitalism (Buch-Hansen, 2014), path dependence also contributes to explaining why different pathways of change can be expected in different places, and why elements of older configurations can re-emerge in different configurations. If the forms of resistance depend upon the forms of oppression, as Scott demonstrates (1986), the forms of unmaking might depend on the forms of capitalism, such that what can cause rupture (e.g. a crack) in one place in the system might not be what causes a crack in another part.

The implications of this proposition are twofold. First, there might exist a range of ways for unmaking capitalist configurations, as exemplified by the diversity of community economies that have emerged and can be consolidated under various banners such as degrowth, transition and environmental justice (Böhm et al., 2014; Escobar, 2015; Feola and Nunes, 2014). Second, the situated character of unmaking calls for careful contextualization in transferring 'lessons' across experiences and contexts, as the processes of unmaking are dependent on the history and existing configurations of particular contexts.

Proposition 2: processes of unmaking involve both symbolic and material deconstruction

The second proposition posits that processes of unmaking involve both symbolic and material deconstruction. This proposition responds to the call for more sophisticated theorization of the deconstruction of modern capitalist societies, which reflect Latouche's critics' shift away from the emphasis on imaginary significations in the notion of decolonization of the imaginary.

The frameworks mobilized in this paper suggest that the unmaking of cultural significations can involve symbolic as well as material processes. Changes in significations might result from radical cultural critique even while the material unmaking of socioecological configurations reinforces, enables, or constrains them. These theories displace imaginary significations from the foreground, and call for a more nuanced analysis of the interplay of symbolic and material configurations in concrete attempts to make space for alternative socioecological configurations.

For example, social practice theory posits that the unmaking of the social order, i.e., existing practices, always and necessarily involves material- as well as symbolic-, cultural-, and immaterial dimensions, as materiality is 'a constitutive element of practice' (Shove et al., 2012:120). Similarly, Scott's (1986) work on everyday resistance shows the interconnected nature of ideological struggles and material practices of resistance, which is echoed by Holloway (2010), who refers to the 'crack' as a process driven by material and practical action at least as much as by cultural critique. Notions of sacrifice also illustrate these interconnections. Sacrifice is material in its self-limitation of consumption, and in its technological specifications and constraints. Sacrifice is also immaterial in terms of the cultural inconsistency of self-limitation that breaks down the social obligation of ever-growing consumption, and the liberating experience that can open up alternative possibilities of being.

Proposition 3: unmaking is a contradictory personal experience

The third proposition posits that processes of unmaking are as much social transformations as personal shifts in being. Whereas the decolonization of the imaginary fails to fully acknowledge the personal, experiential nature of unmaking, this proposition highlights the intertwined personal dynamic involved in unmaking socioecological order.

There are many convergences between the theories considered in this paper with respect to the experiential character of unmaking. Holloway's (2010) notion of the crack emphasizes dignity, autonomy, useful labour, and personal responsibility for action, while rejecting the delegation of action to professional revolutionaries (revolution 'on behalf of') that characterized past revolutions. The literature on everyday forms of resistance echoes this perspective, which highlights the importance of approaching resistance as the 'concrete, shared experience that reflects both the cultural, material and historical givens of its carriers' (Scott, 1985, p. 45). As in Pickerill and Chatterton's (2006) work, Scott exhorts scholars to conceive the unmaking of dominant systems as a concrete and socially meaningful personal experience and pursue a 'deeper appreciation of everyday forms of symbolic resistance and the way in which they articulate with everyday acts of material resistance' (1985, p.304). Along the same lines, both sacrifice and refusal must be understood as personal experiences, in which not only cultural models are at stake, but also more mundane, material, and often inconsistent reconfigurations of everyday lives.

As it is apparent from these perspectives, the personal level is essential not only in terms of motivationally supporting unmaking, but also in shaping the actual unfolding of change of concrete symbolic and material structures in the spaces and times of everyday life. This view is reinforced by the concept of the transformation of social practices, in which the making and unmaking, i.e., the emergent transformation and recombination of elements, practices, or complexes of practices hinges upon the competition of practices for carriers (individuals).

Unmaking at the personal level opens up spaces for ways of being 'otherwise' through the rejection of modern capitalist rationalist and utilitarian subjectivities. This in turn enables the affirmation of a different ontology of cooperation, recognition, love, and friendship. At the same time, the theories and notions of unmaking discussed in this paper expose the partiality of deep-seated assumptions about human nature ascribed to capitalist subjectivities. For example, humans already sacrifice for a higher good and act on the basis of an ethic of care in many spheres of their everyday lives (also see Gibson-Graham, 2006; White and Williams, 2016). Therefore, although unmaking involves the deconstruction of capitalist subjectivities, cracks already exist in the form of common personal experiences of care, responsibility, cooperation, and autonomy that can be leveraged for unmaking other aspects of capitalism (Maniates and Meyer, 2010b). In this sense, the notions of unmaking discussed in this paper are complementary to the anti-utilitarian roots of decolonization of the imaginary.

Narratives of socioecological transformation often highlight the importance of role models, and thus idealize the purity of 'heroes' who are seemingly able to realize sustainability to the fullest. Similarly, the glorification of early back-to-the-landers discouraged those aspirants who could not match the perfection achieved by their predecessors, which severely hindered the expansion of that movement in the United States (Brown, 2011). The decolonization of the imaginary incurs a similar risk. To the extent that this framework has been conceptualized as a goal that can only be achieved at the societal (rather than individual or small group) level, decolonization of the remains ultimately unachievable.

In fact, by recognizing the personal, experiential dimension of unmaking, the contradictions and 'messiness' of its component processes we can acknowledge and accept as part of a process of social and personal change. Unmaking might involve compromises, negotiations, setbacks, and dilemmas. For example, to sacrifice entails a constant renegotiation and compromise in every lived experience. As Hall (2013) and McGranahan (2016a) reiterated, although acts of sacrifice and refusal open spaces for desired alternatives, we must not underestimate the contradictory emotional experiences of the resultant losses of meaning, routines, and material elements constituting personal identities (e.g., King, 2005). If capitalism is pervasive and there is no 'out there' from which to impose changes, and if unmaking can only occur from within the system, then this means that no 'pivot' exists to leverage the system in its totality, and change must occur rather through actions and experiences that exist within capitalism and are therefore potentially contradictory (Holloway, 2010). This condition has also implications for formulating strategies of unmaking.

Proposition 4: unmaking is often hidden, but can be used strategically

The fourth proposition posits that unmaking is often covert or hidden, and individuals and collective initiatives can use a combination of public and hidden unmaking strategies to advance the destabilization of modern capitalist socioecological relations.

Unmaking can occur through public actions such as civil disobedience and protests, as well as the development of disruptive public discourse. Regarding the latter, Turnheim and Geels (2012) suggested that the effect of civic society and social movements has historically been limited in the destabilization of dominant socio-technical regimes. Nevertheless, they emphasized the significant role of public discourse in influencing the legitimacy of industries, enthusiasm for alternatives, feasibility of policy reforms, and the ultimate effectiveness of social movements. Along similar lines, Maniates and Meyer (2010b) proposed to create an alternative discourse of capitalism that both reveals the normality of voluntary sacrifice in everyday life, and prepares for the inevitability of future unwanted sacrifices due to the likely effects of climate change.

Acts of unmaking—such as refusal, recombination of practices, resistance, sacrifice and self-limitation—undermine established and socially accepted order including institutionalized social expectations, institutions, cultural models, and material infrastructure. For this reason, acts of unmaking are often private or actively covert. Moreover, the personal, experiential character of many forms of unmaking bounds these acts to either the private sphere or to a covert social dimension. Like the hidden transcripts of everyday resistance, private or collective but covert acts of unmaking 'make no headlines' (Scott, 1986, p. 8), and are difficult to detect. For example, refusal defies the legitimacy of the State and affirms the right to sovereignty to produce one's own history and subject-body; however, it does so in a manner that is often individual and private rather than through outright public defiance, and is therefore less prone to reinforce the legitimacy of the State and its authority and be co-opted by State control.

Current theorizations of refusal suggest the need for a different 'grammar of activism' that does not replicate conventional politics and can strategically use varying forms of unmaking to operate under multiple conditions and in a range of contexts. Such an understanding of unmaking broadens the repertoire of actions (e.g., boycott, civil disobedience, etc.) and logics (e.g., the pedagogy of disaster) generally associated with decolonization of the imaginary (Latouche, 2015a). Rather, it suggests subtle ways to disengage dominant socioecological configurations, whereby the exit from the dominant system has strategic connotations (Carlsson and Manning, 2010; O'Hearn and Grubačić, 2016). Refusal poses a test of autonomy in challenging the State and the market to foster disengagement from dominant configurations in ways that neither reinforce State (or market) authority nor subject it to outright public defiance. Therefore, unmaking involves a divergence from the substance of social expectations of ever growing consumption or dependency from the use of certain technologies (Latouche, 2011). At the same time, acts of abstention not only challenge those norms, but question the legitimacy of the systems of rules and authority that maintain them.

Building on Latouche (2011), unmaking can also operate strategically through disengagement or abstention from established socioecological configurations as well as their active symbolic or material deconstruction. In either case, there is an attempt to interrupt the reproduction of capitalism and to affirm autonomy and ways of being and doing 'otherwise' (section 5.5). In contrast to dismissals of community economies and grassroots alternatives (e.g., van den Bergh, 2011), this paper conceptualizes some strategic intersections for diverse processes of unmaking to create resonance across a range of levels (individual, social, and socioecological), as well as varying dimensions (spatial, temporal, material, symbolic). Finally, these theories also put into perspective the role of deliberate resistance and agency in processes of unmaking, whereby unmaking might be less a question of motivating more people to resist than of disrupting the elements and circuits of social reproduction to stimulate an emergent change.

Proposition 5: unmaking is generative

The fifth proposition posits that unmaking is a combination of generative processes. The unmaking of destructive modern capitalist socioecological configurations might, like degrowth, suggest a negative movement (negation). In effect, processes of unmaking aim at interrupting the reproduction of capitalist configurations (e.g., labour relations, but also imaginaries and subjectivities). Whether through disengagement or active deconstruction, unmaking suspends the collusion with the socio-ecologically destructive capitalist model, and questions the legitimacy of dominant systems . In addition to that, unmaking also has and inherently implies generative power; it enables the imagination and prefiguration of different futures because it creates the symbolic, material, spatial and temporal vacuum to be filled in 'other' ways. Unmaking is agenda-setting in the way that it opens possibilities otherwise unthinkable or out of reach.

The literature on refusal helps to understand the positive, generative role of unmaking, which withdraws ethical support from a dominant system in favour of other ethical allegiances. Similarly, to sacrifice, i.e., to limit one's own consumption, vindicates the role of citizens who can decide *not* to participate in certain economic relations, as opposed to passive consumers, who can only make choices within a given economic configuration. To sacrifice also reaffirms the primacy of social cohesion by establishing sacrifice as a 'democratic fact' (Meyer, 2010), such that it is perceived as a normal part of living amongst others. Therefore, to sacrifice means more than doing something good for the environment, the effects of which might be negligible, but rather has broader and deeper social implications for individual spiritual and psychological configurations as well as social cohesion and citizenship.

Conclusions

In this paper, I summarized the existing critique of the notion of decolonization of the imaginary, which occupies a central position in the degrowth debate. Ample references in the literature illustrate that the decolonization of the imaginary is a concept that has stimulated degrowth thinking and practice in fruitful ways. The concept of decolonization of the imaginary places critical emphasis on liberation from modern capitalist imaginaries as a possibly essential phase of socioecological transformation toward degrowth. Such emphasis on active decolonization and liberation fundamentally sets degrowth apart from other understandings of transformation to sustainability. Such understandings posit varying mechanisms of change, such as the automatic displacement of unsustainable configurations through innovation, the exploitation of 'windows of opportunity', or the moderation of environmentally and socially disruptive socioeconomic models through the incorporation of new environmental values and social imperatives into existing dominant configurations.

This paper then advanced five propositions to enrich the theorization of decolonization of the imaginary, based on an original discussion of social science theories not previously mobilized in the degrowth debate. Firstly, I proposed that prefigurative and propositional existing alternatives, and diverse community economies, entail an element of unmaking modern capitalist configurations in order to 'make space' for those alternatives. I argued that the productive tensions between construction and deconstruction, refusal and proposition, resistance and experimentation are important in socioecological transformation. Nonetheless, I also contended that in this respect the notion of decolonization of the imaginary falls short of the goal of providing a theory for understanding the function of unmaking in socioecological transformation.

Secondly, I proposed and discussed the concept of unmaking: a multilevel (individual, social, socioecological) and multidimensional (temporal, spatial, symbolic, and material) range of situated processes that can be used strategically to make space for sustainable alternatives. Although this paper offers only a preliminary approach to a theory of unmaking, it simultaneously enriches our understanding of a broader range of processes occurring at different levels and sharpens our capacity to analyse 'actually existing' processes of socioecological transformation. Future empirical research would further sharpen our understanding of power in unmaking. It could also extend the focus beyond the community-based, emergent micro-level processes mostly discussed in this paper to consider other attempts to unmake dominant configurations, such as local and national government policies that free spaces from advertisement, or liberate time from work (such as a shortened work week). Critical to this research agenda is a solid theoretical understanding of unmaking in socioecological transformations and an analytical approach that can reveal the mechanisms through which such transformation can, and indeed already does, occur in concrete experiences of life without the imperative of growth.

Thirdly and lastly, this paper also contributes an application of the interdisciplinary approach necessary to refine our conceptualization and understanding of *how* the socioecological transformation

advocated by degrowth might be realized. This paper has walked some unbeaten tracks of interdisciplinary inquiry that can further enrich the already diverse intellectual roots of degrowth. Nonetheless, more remains to be done. As scholars and activists attempt a discursive and on-the-ground convergence between degrowth and other movements, the resulting theoretical developments will benefit from more diverse and frequent connections with autonomous and anarchist geographies, resistance studies, transition theories, and other frameworks of social change and transformation.

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