



LUND UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Social Sciences

Graduate School

Master of Science in Global Studies

Major: Political Science

Course: SIMV07

Term: Spring 2016

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Contesting Closures

Deconstructing the Political Economy within Degrowth

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Abstract

This study explores the analytical and conceptual closures within political economy and degrowth literature. In order to explore these closures, poststructural theories of postcolonial and queer have been used. Derridian deconstruction has been applied to the degrowth literature to illuminate the silences and contradictions present within the texts. A deconstructive reading of the degrowth literature, through the lenses of postcolonial-queer theory, unravels that the texts reproduce heteronormativity and colonial underpinnings. Further, the texts overlook the materiality of bodies that political economy and processes of production are built upon. This study also shows that the works of feminist economists is marginalized within the degrowth literature. Yet, the thesis concludes that despite these critiques, degrowth literature challenges other analytical closures: of theory and praxis, state/market dichotomy and liberal notions of private property. Hence, it can build alliance with postcolonial-queer theories that resonate the critiques of such closures in order to envision alternative imaginaries.

Key Words: degrowth, political economy, postcolonial-queer theory, Butler-Fraser debate, deconstruction

Acknowledgements

I thank Max Weber, for *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*; it inspired me, years ago, to view the economy as being part of the cultural. I am grateful to Elsy, Rappai and Jacques Derrida, for teaching me the art of reading (which I am still learning). I deeply thank Valerija, for always being there, during the frustrating stages of the thesis: whining, thinking and reading.

I am deeply indebted to Catia Gregoratti and Ekaterina Chertkovskaya, who gave me opportunity and the space to be part of the Degrowth group in Lund, and to explore this alternative imaginary.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Catarina Kinnvall, for being patient, reading my work and giving feedback even at the last moment.

I thank the Lund Degrowth group, with whom we spent wonderful Friday afternoons worrying about the world.

I express gratitude to all the ‘library buddies’, for hours of procrastination and doing the Pomodoro study sessions. To Eden and Sambib, for providing us refuge and computers on weekdays and weekends, without which the thesis would not have been possible.

And to Jacco, for listening to my long explanations of theories, everyday library mundane dramas and being a grammar fanatic.

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1. Introduction

This thesis engages with ‘degrowth’ as a site that brings together many issues such as effects of growth centred economies on the environment, the growing precarity of life; environmental, economic and political justice and, politicization of ecological issues (Sekulova et al. 2013:5). Therefore, it becomes crucial for political science and International Political Economy (IPE) to engage with emerging concepts such as degrowth that bring up this wide myriad of issues together under one frame. While these disciplinary boundaries of the disciplines exist in school textbooks, they seem to collapse outside it, and are not able to capture the changing realities. This thesis is an attempt at questioning the boundaries of the disciplines as well as concepts which are taken-for-granted. Hence, I wish to embark on an exploratory journey in order to open up the notion of the political economy within the degrowth literature. Therefore, the aim of the thesis will be to critically engage with the degrowth literature and deconstruct its political economic foundations.

1.1. Research problem and Research questions

1.1.1. Degrowth: As an alternative imaginary

Engaging with ‘degrowth’ can be challenging because it tries to cover many different aspects of society, such as critiquing economic growth, capitalism, long hours of work, linear notions of development and modernity. Instead, it urges the need for sustainable living (Sekulova et al. 2013:1-6). In order to be able to visualise degrowth, I use the metaphor of the carpet. The notion of a carpet, allows different scholars and activists to weave into the carpet different patterns of concepts and theories. Therefore, degrowth, not only captures the growing global interconnectedness that comprises of the interdependency of the economy on the environment and the social, cultural and, personal; it also provides an alternative imaginary to consider (Sekulova et al. 2013:1-6; Demaria et al. 2013:195-201). Hence, the aim is to take at a closer look at how the notion of the political economy is weaved into the carpet of degrowth.

1.1.2. What does ‘the political economy’ and ‘the economy’ mean for this study?

For this thesis, ‘the political economy’ and ‘the economy’ refer to the notion of the economy, which is based on the logics of rationality, autonomous actors and utility maximising beings. In this sense, ‘the political economy’ is used as a phrase for the abstract notion of the economy as well as for the disciplines of economics and some strands of International Political Economy (IPE) that are based on the premises of mainstream economics and borrow the neo-classical and liberal legacies (Jessop and Sum 2001:90). Further, some schools of thought within social sciences (such as liberal and some Marxist schools) understand the political economy as being separate from other domains of the society, for instance the cultural or the social¹ (Butler 1997:265). This study seeks to explore the critiques of these understandings of the political economy. Hence, the two terms – the economy and political economy – will be used interchangeably (following the linguistic style in IPE (Shields et al. 2011)).

1.1.3. Purpose of the research

When a critical concept such as ‘degrowth’ emerges, which promotes and engages with notions of alternative imaginaries, it can easily become a concept that is persuasive. Or in other words, critical concepts can be less self-critical. The reasons to critique the foundational understandings of the political economy within degrowth literature are as follows: a) it allows me to narrow and streamline the study; b) since degrowth tackles with an important aspect of the modern day economy, which is growth, it is interesting to explore how the political economy is stitched into the degrowth literature². c) It offers the research space to explore the taken-for-granted within alternative imaginaries; and d) degrowth’s interpretative nature provides the opportunity to engage with the concept through

¹ Even though Marxists critique the political economy, for being a capitalist enterprise, yet, they continue to see the mode of production within the economy, as being separate from the cultural. It is acknowledged that there are different strands of Marxism and some are rethinking the cultural and political economy divide (Jessop and Sum 2001:93-35).

² The texts chosen for this research have been listed in Chapter 4: Methodology

different theoretical positions and understandings, in order to formulate new imaginaries for research.

The purpose of the study is twofold: one is to critically engage with the degrowth literature, and the second is to question and deconstruct the notion of political economy within the literature. Therefore, the research questions below seek to engage with the research problem and the focus of this thesis.

- **How can the notion of the political economy be deconstructed through a critical reading of the degrowth literature?**

Sub-question:

- How can degrowth form new alliances with other critical theories in order to explore alternative imaginaries?

1.2. Structure

The broad structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 presents a background, to the study, consisting of two parts – the first section introduces degrowth as the main subject of the study. The second section briefly looks into the critiques of degrowth and explores how the study fits into the scope of research. Chapter 3 lays out the theoretical framework within which I situate the thesis. This also guides the deconstructive analysis of the material. Chapter 4 delves into the methodology comprising of: (a) the methodological tools (Derridian deconstruction), that I use for analysing the material; (b) the process and the steps of the analysis and; (c) the material that I analyse – the degrowth literature. Chapter 5 contains a preliminary/first reading of the material (i.e. the first step of deconstruction); it lays out the main theoretical aspects of degrowth as outlined in the degrowth literature. It further provides me with the themes used to deconstruct the literature as well as ways to conceptualise new alliances for the degrowth movement and theory. Chapter 6 includes the analysis of this study, which is presented in the form of a dialogue between the degrowth material and the

theories from the theoretical framework. Finally, I conclude with Chapter 7, which revisits the main premises and arguments of the thesis.

2. Background

2.1. Degrowth through ages

“The objective is not to make an elephant leaner, but to turn an elephant into a snail. In a degrowth society everything will be different: different activities, different forms and uses of energy, different relations, different gender roles, different allocations of time between paid and non-paid work, different relations with the non-human world.” (Kallis et al. 2015:4)

The snail has come to embody the ideals of the degrowth movement, challenging the fast paced and high growth³ based societies, driven by high production and consumption throughput, which not only puts the natural environment at risk but also harbours exploitative human socio-economic relations (Kallis et al. 2015:3-17). Even though the First International Degrowth Conference for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity took place in Paris in April 2008 (degrowth.org: n. d.), yet, the term ‘degrowth’ has been present in the academic world in some disciplinary circles for at least the last four decades. According to Kallis et al., the term was used for the first time by the French philosopher Andre Gorz (in 1972) in French – *decroissance* – to highlight the need to view economic production in relation to the earth’s resources. Gorz questioned whether the capitalist mode of production was compatible with earth’s finite resources (Gorz 1972:iv in Ibid.:1). While in the 1970s the talks of ‘degrowth’ and challenging of growth obsessed Europe did rounds, the 1980s and 1990s saw a decline of this critique with the advent of the neoliberal era (Kallis et al. 2015:3).

³ ‘Growth’ in this setting has been used to signify economic growth, which is measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (O’Neill 2015:103-106).

Yet, by the late 1990s and early 2000s the term *decroissance* was picked up again by ecological and anti-globalisation activists in Southern Europe, specifically in France, Italy (*decrescita*) and Spain (*decreixement* and *decrecimiento*) (Kallis et al. 2015:3). By 2004 the movement became even more pronounced in France with conferences, initiatives such as starting magazines, journal, etc. The movement gained more ground and media coverage when Fracois Schneider walked through France with a donkey in order to spread the word of degrowth. In 2007, Schneider founded Research and Degrowth (R&D) in France, which is an academic association that does research and coordinates international conferences and events regarding degrowth (Kallis et al. 2015:3; degrowth.org: n. d.). Subsequently, Research and Degrowth (R&D) was also set up in Barcelona. The Barcelona Degrowth circle has come to become a “centre” for the degrowth movement due to some key reasons, such as the publication of the book – *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era* (D’Alisa et al. 2015), having a Degrowth Summer School, and as it has become a small laboratory for the degrowth movement (Kallis 2015; Sklair 2016:1-2).

Since then, there have been various formal and informal degrowth reading groups and research groups in various parts of the world⁴. Research and Degrowth mainly uses its creative international conferences to mobilize and create awareness about degrowth (degrowth.org: n. d.). There have been four International Degrowth Conferences till now – Paris 2008, Barcelona 2010, Montreal 2012, Leipzig 2014 – and the next one will be in Budapest in September 2016 (degrowth.org: n. d.). These conferences have brought together various academics, activist members as well as trade unions, pedestrian, bicycle activists and a diverse group of people together under the banner of degrowth (D’Alisa et al. 2013:213-224).

⁴ Personally, I have worked with the Degrowth research group in Lund, Sweden (Paulsson 2015) and I am in contact with the group of scholars, who have been organising Degrowth symposiums in Delhi, India.

2.2. Concept of 'degrowth'

Despite the fact that degrowth has been inspired by the earlier writers of the 1970s, in more recent times various other concepts, theories and social movements have come to frame this movement. As the word suggests – degrowth – challenges the obsession of growth centred economic practices. It calls for the rethinking of such economies through considerable downscaling of production and consumption, which in turn will lead to the downscaling of the use and exploitation of natural resources, such as fossil fuels (Kallis et al. 2015:4-17). But unlike previous green movements, the degrowth movement and literature views the effects of growth-based socio-economies on many levels (Ibid; Demaria et al. 2013:196).

The works of ecological economists and political ecologists have been emphasizing on the fact that the current economic practices, which are based on extraction and utilising earth's resources are not only ethically questionable but also rationally and logically unsustainable (Jackson 2009:1-9). There is an endless amount of data showing that the human encroachment on nature is significant enough to permanently damage the only living planet that human beings are aware of. Latouche writes that "Humanity is... already consuming almost 30% of the biosphere's capacity for regeneration." (Latouche 2009:24). According to International Energy Agency (IEA) 'peak' oil is expected to arrive by 2020 (Jackson 2009:9)⁵.

Apart from these critiques of the unsustainability of the current extractive economics, the 'growth' idea in economics and politics has been scrutinized by the degrowth literature from various perspectives. One of the most widely present critique in the degrowth literature is that, 'growth' in contemporary times is not simply an economic mechanism to stabilise national and global economies, but instead is a political and ideological obsession. As Latouche terms it, it is "an

⁵ Jackson explains that 'peak' oil implies not that oil will disappear by 2020, but instead that the natural resource will become scarcer and will require more money and resources to extract. (2009:9)

addiction to growth” (Latouche 2009:16), to illustrate his point, he talks about how the national economies are obsessed with the measurement of GDP. After the economic crisis of 2008, the call for growth become even more pronounced, and was justified by the increasing unemployment rates (Ibid.). But, the economic crises also brought to light the volatility of the economic system and created space for the critiques of the system as well (Kallis et al. 2015:8).

Further, degrowth brings together these two arguments. The extractive nature of the human economy and the ideological politics which it entails, accentuates the asymmetric relations between different economies and regions in the globe. Latouches exemplifies that, “If everyone had the same life style as the French, we would need three planets; if we all followed the example of our friends in America, we would need six.” (Latouche 2009:24). Degrowth literature draws from the anti-capitalist, Marxist and post-development writers to emphasize the unequal consumption and distribution patterns among the world’s richest and the poorest sections of the society (Kallis et al. 2015:5). They add to these critical discourses by pointing out the logical inconsistencies of linear growth model and development (Kallis et al. 2015:4-6; Escobar 2015:29-32).

This very preliminary description of some the important tenets of degrowth are just the starting points for a conversation on degrowth, and I will be taking a deeper look at some of these in the next chapters. To conclude this description of degrowth: the movement, the term and the concept of degrowth is gaining recognition due to the ability of not just being a critique but instead suggesting and thinking of alternatives ways of living (Sekulova 2013:1-6; Demaria et al. 2013:191-207; Kallis et al. 2015:1-17). As a response to the dominant discourses of growth, capitalism, unequal socio-economic and political relations, degrowth literature urges to think of new ways of defining and imagining the spaces around us as well as redefining the notion of ‘good life’ (Paulsson 2015). For example, commoning practices, eco-communities, cooperatives, basic and maximum income, work and care-sharing, and other ways of transitioning into a degrowth society (Calvario and Otero 2015:143-146; Cattaneo 2015:165; Latouche

2009:67-96). This is a significant characteristic of the degrowth concept and movement, it bridges understandings, practices, theories and people together and combines many critical voices and possible alternatives within its folds.

2.3. Critiques of Degrowth

The history of degrowth has been rather contemporary in the intellectual and activist quarters. Since the first International Degrowth Conference in Paris 2008, various scholars have engaged with the concept and are exploring its potential as an alternative to the growth society (Ibid.). Various actors across the globe are engaging with the idea of degrowth through blogs, conferences, symposiums and through activist networks⁶. Consequently, the critiques of the concept of degrowth and the degrowth movement have come from numerous sectors. Therefore, it is important to note that they are quite recent and have been chosen due to some key factors such as availability and relevance to this study⁷. There are three articles (van den Bergh 2010; Schwartzman 2011; Kallis and March 2015), and two blogposts, which became ‘viral’ among the degrowth world emailing list and Twitter (Raworth 2015; Kallis 2015)⁸.

2.3.1. Degrowth vs steady state economy and green economy

One of the most recurrent criticisms levelled against degrowth is that it is not economically viable. Writers such as Schwartzman (2011) claim that degrowth lacks the ability to be politically pursued and, instead the global transformation of using green economy will solve the problem of energy efficiency. Further he states that, what needs to ‘degrow’ is the fossil fuel and nuclear dependency on energy, and instead green energy sources such as solar energy need to ‘grow’ (Schwartzman 2011:120).

⁶ For example, the Degrowth India Initiative in Delhi, India (Conference 2014; Symposium 2015; also Facebook page); the Oxfam blog debates (Raworth 2015; Kallis 2015)

⁷ The decision to choose these particular articles and blog was also due to their impact, in terms of their presence on academic databases such as Google Scholar and Lund University Libraries (LUBsearch)

⁸ Raworth (2015): <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/why-degrowth-has-out-grown-its-own-name-guest-post-by-kate-raworth/>

Kallis (2015): <http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/youre-wrong-kate-degrowth-is-a-compelling-word/>

Another critique is that degrowth writers tend to dismiss all the aspects attached to growth, such as the need for increasing growth to decrease the unemployment rates (critics such as Schwatzman 2011 and van der Bergh 2010). Writers such as van den Bergh are more critical of degrowth and instead suggest for alternatives such as ‘a-growth’, and a steady state economy, which comprise a steady pace of growth, within the limits of the earth’s natural resources (Ibid.).

2.3.2. The ‘missile word’

Latouche writes that “‘De-growth’ is a political slogan with theoretical implications, or what Paul Aries (2005) calls an ‘explosive word’ that is designed to silence the chatter of those who are addicted to productivism.” (Latouche 2009:7). The term ‘degrowth’ has come to be known as an ‘explosive word’ and a ‘missile word’ (Latouche 2009:7; Raworth 2015). Raworth, in her blog, states that instead of a ‘missile word’, ‘degrowth’ has become a ‘smoke bomb’, because “Throw it into a conversation and it causes widespread confusion and mistaken assumptions.” (Raworth 2015). She goes on to say that as soon as ‘degrowth’ comes up in a discussion, the discussion is spent on justifying and clearing out what degrowth means instead of the focus on strategies of change (Ibid.). Writers such as van der Bergh (2010) and Raworth point out that since degrowth has been so widely defined and interpreted, that the term lacks clarity and transparency (van den Bergh 2010; Raworth 2015). According to Raworth, the term degrowth would not be politically viable due to its negative connotations (Raworth 2015).

What is interesting about these critiques is that degrowth writers have engaged with them. Therefore, instead of the critiques simply being made in one direction, there has been a dialogue and discussion among and between these camps of ‘pro-degrowth’ and the sceptics.

2.3.3. Self-criticism

Kallis, in his response to Raworth’s blog, argues the term ‘degrowth’ always leads to interesting and thought provoking debates and discussions. He equates the idea of degrowth with terms such as ‘equality’ or ‘economic growth’ which are

complex and lack clarity, and mean different things to different people. He defends the term ‘degrowth’ by stating that because of its openness it creates a “vibrant community” of students, scholars, activists that disagree; and the degrowth conferences are a good example to see that the term brings different groups of people from different spaces together (Kallis 2015).

The book, *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for the New Era* (D’Alisa et al. 2015), contains fifty-one entries and encompasses different point of views that not only frame the degrowth debate but also come from diverse settings, including the ones that are critical to degrowth (such as Picchio 2015:208-214). Further, Kallis and March’s recent article critiques some notions which Latouche uses in his book, such as democracy, and urges degrowth to be more self-critical of these terms (Latouche 2009; Kallis and March 2015:361).

2.4. Where does this study fit in?

The degrowth discussion is ongoing, and this thesis is an attempt to contribute to these discussions of critical thinking. While the degrowth literature has been critiqued on issues of whether it is applicable or not, this study explores the spaces within degrowth that can be critically read and opened up. Mexican environmentalist scholar, Leff, states that the process of degrowth should not end at the point of a ‘degrowth society’, but instead should carry on the deconstruction of the modern notions embedded within political economy itself (Leff 2009:103).

This study departs from this call and pursues the deconstruction of the political economy. It further adds to the critiques of degrowth, which lack two key factors: first, that the critique of the political economy within degrowth is latent, and second, that a poststructural reading of the degrowth literature has only come from very few sections of the academia (such as Leff 2009). Hence, the next chapter lays out the theoretical framework of this study, which has been inspired by poststructural ways of opening up concepts in order to contest closures.

3. Theoretical Framework

Apart from guiding my theoretical understandings and analysis, this chapter situates the research within the larger framework of discussions addressing political economy. These theories do not claim ‘what the economy is’, instead they inform this study with possibilities to open up and explore categories and understandings of reality within academia that are taken-for-granted. Moreover, it is also an attempt to bring together various schools of thought that resonate similar critiques.

For the purpose of questioning the taken-for-granted as well as for a critical reading of the degrowth literature, I draw from poststructural theory to inform my epistemological and ontological frames. In addition, poststructuralism also provides the methodological tool of deconstruction in order to carry out the critical reading of the material chosen.

3.1. Revisiting the focus of the study

Before going into the theories that form the theoretical framework for this thesis, I want to elaborate on the things that are under the microscope for this study.

As mentioned in the introduction, the subject of the study is to critically engage with the degrowth literature through opening up the notion of the political economy within the literature. The rationale behind using the frame of degrowth is that it tries to capture a wide myriad of issues present in the contemporary times; hence, it acts as a good departure point. Situating the critical discussion of opening up the economy within degrowth literature provides me with an opportunity to further diversify degrowth by bringing in post-structural perspectives.

3.2. Epistemology and Ontology

For this study I approach degrowth as an ‘interpretative frame’ (Demaria et al. 2013:191), which offers me an interdisciplinary concept and a theoretical variety to begin with and to depart from. Moreover, it allows me to examine this carpet of

degrowth and weave into it a number of theoretical understandings which I find to be missing such as post-structural theories. Furthermore, one of the main limitations of this research is that the scope of critiques of ‘the economy’ is quite broad and diverse. But the reason to choose these particular theories, out of the many, has been rationalised below, under each of the subheadings, as I show how I propose to use the theories for my analysis. These poststructural theories also help form my epistemological and ontological standpoints.

Degrowth as an ontological framework offers an alternative imaginary to explore as well as an interpretative approach to interpret and engage with. As Kallis et al. write, degrowth has often been associated with the notion that “smaller can be beautiful” (Kallis et al. 2015:4). This corroborates with the idea of cutting back on production and consumption, but the writers bring out another understanding of ‘degrowth’, which is not simply *less* or *small*, but ‘something *different*’ (Ibid.). This alternative imaginary is posed against the backdrop of increasing effects of climate change, linear notions of development, the overbearing ideology of growth and progress, and dominant ideas of increasing work, skills and other aspects of human beings to be able to fit into the demands of the market (Kallis et al. 2015:1-15).

Due to the fact that degrowth comprises of a range of disciplinary and theoretical underpinnings, my critical engagement with the degrowth literature has also been inspired and informed by various disciplinary standpoints. This critical exploration is not only a way to critique the degrowth literature but also an attempt to contribute to this movement and to the idea of “activist led-science”, which Demaria et al. state is a central part of the degrowth movement (Demaria et al 2013:191).

Poststructuralism as a theoretical school of thought not only guides the theoretical, methodological and analytical sections of this thesis, but it also informs my epistemological and ontological stance for this study. The main reason to use this theoretical school as a lens to understand degrowth and political economy is that it offers the conceptual space and tools to question the taken-for-granted concepts.

Apart from this, poststructuralism also offers the need to rethink, renegotiate and formulate different ways of approaching and understanding concepts. This is in line with the idea of alternative imaginaries as mentioned above, that degrowth seeks to visualise. Subsequently, poststructural reading offers alternative means of narrating ideas and concepts (Griffin 2011:43-56).

3.3. What comprises ‘the political economy’?

In the following sections I gather some of the main critiques of ‘the political economy’ which are central to this thesis. They have come to redefine previous understandings of the term and have had significant impact in the development of a poststructural reading of the political economy. Further, they guide my methodological and analytical frameworks.

3.3.1. The Butler-Fraser debate

I start with the famous Butler-Fraser debate, which aesthetically captures the interstices that intersect and lead to new ways of encountering the political economy. There are two main reasons to situate the thesis in this particular debate – first, because it raises an interesting theoretical and conceptual dialogue between two highly influential theoretical schools of poststructuralism and Marxist feminism. This dialogue helps this study in understanding some of the struggles and differences on how different theoretical schools ground their understanding of ‘the economy’. Second, Butler has convincingly demonstrated the need to rethink Marxian structuralist assumptions that rely on the base-superstructure model. The Marxist notion of the economy not only over-determines the importance of the economic base but also inherently places other domains of social relations their distinct positions within the superstructure (such as the social, cultural, political and personal). The superstructure is essentially and materially dependent on the economic base and derives its meaning through the economy, and not vice versa. Hence, the Butler-Fraser debate brings to light the need to use alternatives to engage with the idea of the economy such as queer and post-structural theoretical and ontological frames.

Fraser (1995) evaluates the activist and academic debates of the late twentieth century. According to her 'struggles of recognition' have come to dominate the arena of political activism. With these 'struggles of recognition' she refers to groups that demand "'recognition of difference'... mobilized under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, 'race', gender, and sexuality" (1995:68). Fraser locates these groups within what she terms 'cultural recognition', against the political struggles of socio-economic redistribution. She categorises two kinds of injustices – first, socio-economic injustices, which are rooted in the political economy, such as groups that are economically marginalized. Secondly, cultural or symbolic injustices, which are rooted in "social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication", such as groups that are culturally marginalised, invisibilised or misrepresented (Ibid.:71).

In this classic text, Fraser lays out the framework of 'remedies' in order to tackle these two broad categorizations of injustices. For socio-economic injustices, she points to redistributive remedies such as reorganization of the division of labour, redistribution of income and other ways of restructuring economic structures. Whereas, for cultural and symbolic injustices, she calls for social and cultural transformation through recognition of diverse groups, visibilization of marginalised groups and other "ways that would change *everybody's* sense of self." (Ibid.:71). Even though Fraser makes these distinctions, she acknowledges that 'redistribution' and 'recognition' are primarily for analytical purposes and that they intersect. She argues that economic redistribution has an underlying basis of recognition and that expressions of recognition could have notions of economic redistribution as well (Ibid.:71-72).

This article by Fraser, 'From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age' (1995), sparked a debate between her and Butler; who responded with a provokingly titled paper – 'Merely Cultural' (1997). Butler situates her dialogue with Fraser within the larger scope of the developments of the leftist politics of the late twentieth century. She argues that over the years the growing presumption has been that "poststructuralism has thwarted Marxism",

and has been accused of being “destructive, relativistic, and politically paralyzing” (Butler 1997:265-266). Further, she states that the left has been experiencing a ‘cultural turn’ which has created a rift within the left, and the cultural focus has been built on identity politics. In ‘Merely Cultural’, Butler rather convincingly illustrates her argument, by using parody as a literary tool to engage with Fraser and with the larger debate among the leftists regarding this cultural/poststructural turn. Reflecting on her positionality of using parody she writes, “It is, I would argue, impossible to perform a convincing parody of an intellectual position without a prior affiliation with what one parodies, without having and wanting an intimacy with the position one takes in or on as the object of parody.” (Ibid.:266). In other words, Butler engages with the Marxist critique of the ‘cultural turn’, not by dismissing or by mocking the ideas (as one would assume with the term – parody), but instead by taking the position of a Marxist feminist, and hence she says that her parody is from having an affiliation as well as affection for that intellectual position. She challenges Fraser by using a different reading and understanding of the Marxist notions such as the base-superstructure model. And suggests that the reading of Marx and Engels has been simplified and reduced because they insist on bringing in social relations and social productions of gender and family into the scope of understanding the economy (she uses Marx and Engel’s *The German Ideology* (1846) and Engel’s *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884) to illustrate her point) (Ibid.:271).

Butler further contests the analytical distinctions that Fraser makes – of redistribution being in the domain of the political economy and, recognition being within the scope of the cultural. Butler problematizes this notion of recognition, which is associated with “cultural politics as factionalizing, identitarian and particularistic” and in the Marxist politics is understood as trivial and “merely cultural” (Ibid.:265). Recognition is seen as being separate from the redistributive ideals of restructuring political economy. Further, Butler points out that in Fraser’s view, issues of identities such as sexuality are not seen as being central or

directly linked to the political economy. This is precisely due to the understanding of the “economic” in Marxist analysis, which only addresses issues directly tied to unpaid or exploited labour. Therefore, Butler calls for the “expansion of the “economic” sphere itself to include both the reproduction of goods as well as the social reproduction of persons” (Ibid.:272). She also exemplifies through the notion of legality, wherein the legal status of beings is dependent both on culturally ascribed norms as well as their material status in society. Another example she provides are of lesbians and gays who are marginalised and excluded from various state-sanctioned institutions such as the military and the family; the latter being an important economic unit for the state for taxes, property law, etc. (Ibid.:273).

This debate lays out important theoretical components for this thesis. There are two crucial points which I extract for the purpose of this research. First, the Marxist and the Marxist feminist understandings of the economy, based on distinguishing the different aspects of the society (the base and the superstructure) are analytically reductionist and cannot cater to the purpose of opening up and deconstructing the notion of the economy. And secondly, that post-structuralism can offer different sets of lenses in order to examine the taken-for-granted divisions inherent within political economy and degrowth.

3.3.2. Critical International Political Economy and Poststructuralism

Following from the above, Butler’s call for a poststructural understanding of the political economy leads us to the interdisciplinary field of Critical IPE (International Political Economy). Contemporary works by scholars such as Stuart Shields, Ian Bruff, and Penny Griffin (in Shields et al. 2011) and Ben Rosamond (2006) also urge for an opening up of the field of political economy to new disciplines as well as theoretical schools of thought such as poststructuralism. In addition, I situate this thesis within the broader field of IPE, which allows me to carry out two crucial tasks. The first, is to bring in degrowth within the scope of the discipline, since degrowth directly deals with many of the political economic

concepts such as the growth, market, work, and so on. And secondly, degrowth as well as poststructural theory provide space to expand the disciplinary frontiers of IPE, by bringing in different issues and narratives into the fold of the political economy (this will be further explored in the analysis chapter).

- **Contesting closures**

In her essay, 'Poststructuralism in/and IPE', Griffin departs from exploring the term 'critical' in Critical IPE studies and states that for her, critical research entails the questioning of the taken-for-granted, as well as one that resists closure and allows for different possibilities (Griffin 2011:43). She argues that as opposed to mainstream rationalist practices in IPE, which tend to view concepts and events in isolation, poststructural analysis offers alternative ways to understand issues in IPE. Griffin states that poststructural theory is a way to combine "material, ideational and embodied cultures of privilege" (Ibid.:43) in order to understand complex realities better. She points out that poststructuralism has been underused in the field of IPE, which has led to many concepts being taken-for-granted in the discipline, and are also reduced and hence remain abstract, such as 'capital', 'finance' or 'risk'. Griffin states that events such as the recent global financial crisis cannot be theoretically or conceptually understood in purely political economy terms, and that these processes can only be understood if they are seen within the larger scheme of analysis, that bring in socio-cultural structures, properties and biases that encompass our daily life (Ibid.:44).

Griffin's poststructural analysis of the global financial crisis raises the wider critique on the disciplinary closure of the political economy. She argues that certain assumptions and rationalities which have come to dominate the understanding of the economy are rational behaviour, economic growth and national economic stability. These rationalities are presented as universal and neutral but instead are a result of strongly established actions and procedures (Ibid.:45-47). Further, Griffin observes that one of the reasons for disciplines such as IPE to resist theoretical analysis of poststructuralism is because mainstream IPE does not want to engage in open scholarly debates questioning and rethinking

the notions of 'rationalism'. To illustrate this she gives the example of the idea of human productivity within mainstream IPE; the concept of human productivity is taken as being 'value neutral' on paper, but the narrow understanding of such terms overlooks its impact, which involves the curtailing of the agency of people, families and communities (Ibid.:45-47). The value neutrality of these terms and their framing through rationalistic thinking reduces the complexities of their meanings. In other words, it leads to simplified categorisations of the terms such as 'formal' and the 'informal' sectors in political economic, and the characteristics of what they comprise. Griffin gives the example of issues that are seen within the notion of 'informal activities' in IPE studies. Everyday activities such as "work" that is not directly paid for, like voluntary work or domestic obligations are clubbed within this 'informal' and are not analytically studied within IPE. This avoidance of the everyday life of human bodies allows IPE to ignore objects that are socio-economically produced and are context-specific. According to Griffin, human bodies become an important site for the study of political economy, because "understanding how bodies are regulated, pre- and proscribed is crucial to understanding the processes and practices of the GPE (global political economy), not least because conventional approaches to IPE tend to avoid talking about bodies, instead assigning human features to abstract objects (money, weapons, state, corporation or institution) while studiously avoiding the possibility that these objects are socially produced and context specific" (Ibid.:49-50).

Therefore, for Griffin, what poststructural theory brings to the field of IPE is not only the questioning of the taken-for-granted but also an *embodied* approach which allows for taking account of bodies that are inscribed with meanings of society, such as race, sex, culture, physical ability and so on. And further, to make sense of how the social and the economic also prescribes upon "bodies, what to expect of them and what they are expected to do" (Ibid.:50). To elaborate on this, one can go back to the idea of 'human productivity', which Griffin uses. The notion of human productivity is not only attached to one's body (for e.g. through one's physical capabilities) but is also constantly determined by what the market

defines as productivity. Another example, which Griffin mentions is that of the socio-culturally and economically prescribed notion of reproductive heterosexuality. She points out that human social reproduction is not acknowledged in IPE, due to the fact that it brings in the “messier” conceptualisations that disrupt the essentialist and universal norms and standards that are upheld in IPE. Further, she states that poststructural writings of postcolonial and gendered narratives, such as queer theory, bring in the complexities of power-laden concepts which IPE does not acknowledge, and these poststructural critiques also account for bodies, inscribed with socio-economic meanings (Ibid.:47-50). According to Griffin, bringing in sexuality into the political economy can help challenge the things that are assumed as ‘natural’ in IPE, such as authorities, hierarchies, and socio-economic discourses. She illustrates this point with the example of neoliberalism. She says that the dominance of neoliberalism in political economy is presumed because it is based on the assumption that the rule of the market encompasses all aspects of people’s lives. Moreover, components and behaviours such as free market, private property and rationalism are perceived as ‘natural’ and a ‘norm’. And people are considered as essential parts of the market, and are ‘marketable’, and are urged to act out their market behaviour in line with their gender identity, racial and class positionality (Ibid.:51).

What becomes clear from the above discussion of Griffin’s text is that conceptual closures and boundaries are important for the discipline of IPE, to mark out its subjects and areas of study. Yet, another interesting example that Griffin brings forth makes this point clearer. She analyses the policy documents of the World Bank which are formulated to tackle ‘women’s work’, and to increase their participation in the market. She points to some key aspects of these reports, wherein ‘women’s work’ is ‘naturally’ allocated in the ‘reproductive sphere’ and under ‘informal’ economy (Griffin uses World Bank documents of 2002, 2003, and 2006 (Ibid.:51)). This example further elucidates that the closures of informal,

formal, household, private and public are constantly reinforced within political economic analysis.

This discussion of disciplinary and analytical closures can also be observed in Bruff's 'Overcoming State/Market Dichotomy' (Shields et al. 2011: 80). Bruff borrows from Watson (2005) the argument that, due to the fact that IPE has emerged from the field of International Relations within political science, IPE has incorporated the disciplinary dichotomy of 'politics' and 'economics' (Bruff in Shields et al. 2011:80-83). This dichotomy of fields has further led to analytical distinctions of state and market; while the entity of 'state' was the sole subject of political science, 'market' was a key subject for the study of economics. Bruff emphasizes that not only is this dichotomy false, but it is also ascribed normative properties which define these two entities. Both these exist as autonomous beings which "contain impersonal properties intrinsic to themselves, as relatively self-organizing components of society" (Ibid.:82). Further, Bruff posits that despite prior efforts by IPE theorists, works within IPE have only reinforced the state/market dichotomy; to illustrate this point he cites some titles of books such as, *Small States in World Markets* by Katzenstein, 1985; *States Against Markets* by Schwartz, 1994 (Ibid.:85). The autonomous divisions of 'market' and 'state' is in line with the rationalistic logic, which Griffin talked about in her essay. Bruff urges theorists within critical IPE to engage with both of these entities as sites of unequal power relations, rather than independently existing units (Ibid.:83).

If one were to correlate the Butler-Fraser debate; Griffin's observations about the discipline of IPE and Bruff's problematization of the state/market dichotomy, one can infer that conventional studies of political economic analysis as well as Marxist materialist understanding of the political economy tend to operate within some kind of closures. These closures could be the analytical distinctions that Fraser makes between redistribution and recognition, or the ones that are taken-for-granted within mainstream IPE such as 'informal' and 'formal' economy. What these closures seem to do is that they make categorizations, which reduce

and simplify the subjects and objects that could be studied within political economy. Therefore, for Fraser, while redistributive aspects of human society are to be dealt within the socio-economic sphere, recognition and associated aspects such as culture, identity, sexuality, etc. remain outside the purview of the political economy. In the case of Griffin's critique of IPE, the analytical distinctions made within political economy become closures and are not only taken-for-granted but also become 'the normative' way to do political economy, and are resistant to other theoretical and analytical schools such as post-structuralism.

This critique of the disciplinary closure of political economy, and more specifically the discipline of economics is being acknowledged, reflected upon and questioned by various scholars in different fields. Some of the more recent works of scholars have become popular within academic circles as well as within the mainstream. The recent influential works of Piketty (2014) and Jackson (2009) also initiate this critique and questioning of the disciplinary closure of economics and political economy. While these works have been important in raising this critique, they do not provide the theoretical resources or the methodological tools relevant for this study.

Instead, to carry out poststructural analysis, I depart from the arguments made by Butler (1997) and Griffin (2011). As mentioned earlier, both of these scholars emphasize the need to approach the political economy through the lenses of the socio-cultural as a way to deconstruct the closure and to illustrate that the political economy cannot exist outside the cultural, social, political and personal. To reemphasize the fact that the aim is not to rationalise the divides between redistribution (sphere of political economy) and recognition (cultural sphere), but to see both as being part of a complex whole. To revisit Griffin's argument that poststructuralist theories such as queer and postcolonial studies can offer complex ways to address previously neglected issues, such as the gendered, racial and colonial realities within the political economy, challenges the closures as well as the taken-for-granted and 'naturalness' of concepts within political economy (Griffin 2011). This is also resonated in Butler's article, where she draws upon

queer, lesbian and gay studies to note that scholars in these fields have been challenging the autonomy of issues within academia and are working on intersections and confrontations of politics of sexuality, class, and feminism (Butler 1997:276). Further, she critiques the autonomous spheres of ‘the cultural’ and the ‘political economy’ and urges to rethink whether “the association of the sexual with the cultural and the concomitant effort to render autonomous and degrade the cultural sphere the unthinking responses to a sexual degradation perceived to be happening within the cultural sphere, an effort to colonize and contain homosexuality in and as the cultural itself?” (Ibid.). To elaborate on the quote, Butler provokingly asks if the issues of discrimination based on one’s sexuality (or race, gender, caste, religion) are only a matter that can be raised within the cultural; and that the cultural/political economy divide leads to distinguishing them into hierarchies of primary and secondary oppressions, hence resubordinating them (Ibid.). Therefore, poststructural theories such as queer and postcolonial theories, can lead to a more critical reading of the degrowth literature, by bringing in alternative narratives and imaginaries into the fold of the degrowth movement.

3.3.3. Postcolonial-Queering of the political economy

In line with the above, I now explore some recent works emerging in postcolonial-queer theory. These new discussions are questioning and rethinking the possible ways to understand the cultural, social, political and personal spaces that are invisibilized within the conventional studies of political economy. But before I go into the theoretical discussion of this theory, I layout some of the thoughts, mentioned by degrowth scholars, where they talk about how the queer movement has been influential to the degrowth movement.

Revisiting the blog debate of Raworth (2015) and Kallis (2015); Raworth challenges degrowth on many points. One of her key arguments is that the term ‘de-growth’ is a “negative frame” (Raworth 2015). She draws this argument from Lakoff, who suggests that terms that are used to negate concepts, in this case –

‘growth’, only make the concepts that they negate more strong. She uses Lakoff’s example of “Don’t think of an elephant!” which she argues is similar to degrowth’s claim of “Don’t think of growth”. Instead, she suggests positively framed terms and phrases such as ‘prosperity’, ‘wellbeing’, or ‘flourishing’ (Ibid.).

Kallis’ response to Raworth, is that degrowth is an important concept because it challenges the dominance of the growth ideology, which is more predominant now than ever (Kallis 2015). Kallis further argues that not only does degrowth challenge the linear idea of progress but he cites Latouche, who said that “degrowth is seen as negative, something unpardonable in a society where at all costs one must “think positively”” (Kallis 2015). He then presents the counter arguments to ‘positive frames’ and states that the idea of constant flourishing and being rational and “useful” is in line with the notion of being always productive, based on Protestant ethics. He gives the example of queer movement which “turned an insult into pride.” (Ibid.) and this art of linguistic subversion can be enabling for a movement. Kallis says that, “degrowth” which is “a subversive negation of growth” should not be dismissed, since it questions the taken-for-granted (Ibid.).

The more recent theoretical works of queer theory not only offer linguistic subversion but also offer critical theoretical and analytical rethinking of the taken-for-granted. Queer theorists such as Evangeline Heiliger, S. Charusheela, Nikita Dhawan, Ankte Engle and others have been theorizing and reimagining ways to encounter the economy and open its disciplinary closures. They are creating spaces which combine two anti-foundationalist theories to form a postcolonial-queer narrative as well as bringing together Marxism and poststructuralist theories (Dhawan et al. 2015). There are several reasons for taking this line of postcolonial-queer thought to further analyse and open up political economy. First, it seems logical to proceed with exploring the interstices of theories that are associated with ‘the cultural’ in order to critique the boundaries of the political economy. This allows the study to engage in a conversation with the Butler-Fraser

debate and to reiterate that recognition (socio-cultural and socio-political) and redistribution (socio-economic) cannot be decoupled. Secondly, it provides a space to open up the frontiers of IPE, which Griffin urges us to think about. Lastly, for this study, it provides with the opportunity to bring in different imaginaries into the carpet of degrowth, in order to create alliances for degrowth with theories that have become important for the questioning of the taken-for-granted.

One of the points of departure towards the postcolonial-queering of the economy, is that Dhawan et al. begin their introduction by revisiting the case of a historical workers' struggle of January 1912, in Massachusetts, USA. They narrate that this resistance struggle became revolutionary for workers' rights because it comprised various immigrant communities and was mainly led by women. This movement also gave rise to the historic slogan, "Bread and Roses"; which has become an important slogan for Marxist Feminists throughout history. It was part of the famous speech, which stated that, "The worker must have bread, but she must have roses too" (speech, delivered by Rose Schneiderman (Eisenstein 1983) cited in Dhawan et al. 2015:1). Dhawan, Engel, Gorvin, Holzhey and Woltersdorff write that, "The slogan pairing bread and roses, appealing for both fair wages and dignified as well as pleasant work conditions, challenges the uncoupling of labour struggle for economic advances and struggles striving for recognition, dignity and quality of life" (Ibid.:1). This brings the discussion back to the Butler-Fraser debate of redistribution and recognition; these postcolonial-queer theorists problematize the economic totality of workers' rights which is conventionally seen within the political economy. They note that redistribution and recognition cannot be separated and instead are rather deeply correlated; socio-economic factors are about both, redistribution and recognition, and hence are socio-cultural and socio-political simultaneously.

Another point of departure for the postcolonial queer critique of the economic analysis starts from critiquing the logics of 'self-interest' and the notion of 'rationality', which was also mentioned by Griffin above (Griffin 2011).

According to S. Charusheela the concepts present in economics, such as ‘self-interest’, ‘choice’, ‘reason’, ‘rationality’, are positioned in opposition to ‘desire’, ‘emotion’, ‘passion’. This divide is a result of the epistemic historical narrative belonging to the “bourgeois liberal modernity” (S. Charusheela 2015: xviii-xix). She states that the ‘Self’ in the economy is constructed on the basis of an “opposition to a raced, classed, sexed, gendered, colonial Other” (as poststructuralist and postcolonial theorists have been theorising) (Ibid.:xviii). Further, S. Charusheela calls to move beyond social-scientific realist behaviourist tradition and instead approach *Other* ways of narrating the relation between the economy and desire such as queer theory, postcolonial theory, race/ethnic studies, poststructuralist and Althusserian Marxism (Ibid.:xix).

An example of this *Other* way of narrating the political economy, is provided by Heiliger, in the chapter titled, ‘Queer economies: Possibilities of queer desires and economic bodies (because the economy is not enough)’ (Heiliger 2015:195). Heiliger states that she wants to “dethrone ‘the economy’ as a unified, closed system” (Ibid.:197). She does this by bringing in her own personal experience of being queer, poor and working-class, and by looking into spaces that are invisibilised by the traditional discipline of economics. She draws from examples of alternative, non-capitalist and non-normative livelihood practices, which are considered as being ‘outside’ of wage-earning capital (Ibid.:196). She uses the metaphor of a body to describe the economy and argues that there are many types of ‘economic bodies’ that exist. While some are larger, such as the capitalist system, others are smaller, such as micro-economies, families, groups. These economic bodies are built on and through people, tools, technical services materials, and actions such as labour, exchange, gifting (Ibid.:197). One of her main arguments is that capitalism and the dominant economic practices is only one kind of economic body and that bringing up alternative and non-normative economic practices will help “pluralise and multiply economic systems” (Ibid.:198). Heiliger argues that the image and the understanding of the totality of ‘Capitalism’ and the economy as singular, unified, totalising economy needs to be dislocated and dethroned by giving space to alternative and non-normative

economic practices within the academia. She borrows this notion of questioning the totalising effect of capitalism by Gibson-Graham (Ibid.:199). Further, she states that these examples of non-normative economic practices also highlight structural inequalities, comprising of vulnerable human bodies that exist on the margins of the socio-economy. This perception of plurality allows for different people to formulate economic practices that are plural and can create diverse understandings of the needs and desires of different people (Ibid.:199).

Heiliger illustrates these alternative and non-normative socio-economic practices through bringing in the account of her family's regular routine of trashpicking (Ibid.:195). She contextualises trashpicking not only as an economic means of sustenance but also as bodies that express resistance to the idea of consumerism. Trashpicking could be seen as a way to counter buying one's properties and instead reuse goods and commodities wasted or abandoned by others; thus, undermining the capitalist rhetoric of buying to fulfil one's needs. It also blurs the lines of ownership, as many families leave their imprint of use onto these goods (Ibid.:200-201). Heiliger conceptualises these alternative and non-normative activities as 'queer economies' (Ibid.). 'Queer economies' signify 'queer desires' which question the normative notions of consumerism and 'basic needs' since they present *Other* ways of livelihood and survival. Also, they undermine the normative logics of organisation of the community and the economy (Ibid.).

In this essay Heiliger brings in an intriguing observation. She illustrates the complexities of the notion of 'class'; one's income could assign one with a specific class, but the everyday performance of being from another class could blur the lines of one's own class identity. For instance, while her family would be categorised as 'poor', according to the income; the spaces that they encountered such as school, work, and church would push them into spaces of 'mainstream middle class'. As well as, some things that they found while trashpicking could be categorised as 'middle class' commodities (Ibid.:195-196). This point that Heiliger makes, further brings in the complexity of redistribution-recognition, and could also be seen as a critique of the Marxist understanding of 'class', which is

understood to be dependent on one's socio-economic position in a society. Instead, this reflection not only problematizes that claim but also critiques the idea that class as an identity can be 'essentialised' (such as poststructuralist writers have shown about people's identities regarding gender, caste, religion). This point is important for this study, because it reiterates that the divide between the political economy and socio-cultural, or socio-political, are artificially drawn boundaries in order to reduce and simplify people's experiences.

While Marxists and Marxist-Feminists have been criticised for over-determining the political economy and class (as shown by Butler); queer theorists such as Klapeer and Schönplflug reflect upon the ignorance of class dynamics within queer scholarship. In their essay, 'Queer needs commons! Transgressing the fiction of self-ownership, challenging westocentric proprietism', they explore the critiques of the liberal economic understanding of private property (2015:164). They cite Davies (1999), to highlight that while queer theorists have been reconceptualising different modes of 'being', they have overlooked the "problematic interlinkages" between 'being' and "ideas of 'having'" (Klapeer and Schönplflug 2015:164). By looking into the intersections of 'having' and 'being' the authors corroborate with Heiliger's point of complexities of socio-economic and socio-cultural embodiments as well as, problematize the redistribution-recognition distinctions.

To elaborate very briefly, Klapeer and Schönplflug use the Marxist critique of the self-ownership as well as bring in postcolonial critiques which point to individualistic notions of sexual freedom and autonomy within queer literature that "reproduces the 'imperial gaze'" and only makes 'white queer' visible (they borrow from Perez (2005) and McCluskey (2009), cited in Ibid.:166). In other words, they draw a parallel between "liberalism and (certain) queer conceptualisations of identity, freedom and autonomy" (Ibid.). Further, they equate the notions of 'the self' in 'self-ownership' to the historical and philosophical links that drive capitalist imaginaries (this is similar to what I drew from S. Charusheela (2015) and Griffin (2011)). Klapeer and Schönplflug

deconstruct John Locke's notions of private property by bringing in gendered and race-critical reading of his text. Lockean notion of private property was inherently gendered, racial and classed, which presupposed 'whiteness' and maleness in order for a person to claim 'his' rightful private property (Ibid.:167). Instead, drawing from Federici (2010) they urge for a "queer theory and practice of 'queer commons'" (Ibid.:172). They use the idea of shared property and shared human subjectivity as an expression to destabilise the capitalist economy (similar to the conceptualisations of Heiliger). Here they state that the blurred boundaries between human, and non-human, nature and culture, and so on, challenge the individualistic notions of autonomy and private property (Ibid.:172-173).

3.4. The next stop

The above presented theoretical framework draws on a range of theoretical concepts and ideas. To summarise briefly, I situate the critical discussion of opening up the political economy within the Butler-Fraser debate and Griffin's critique of critical IPE. This provides me with a point of departure to further engage with poststructuralist theories of postcolonial and queer. The use of these theories, which are seen within this frame of 'the cultural', allow me to open up the political economy through non-normative foundational premises.

Moreover, not only do they provide me with critical perceptions for opening up the political economy, but they give a frame for making visible the gendered and the racial connotation that go invisibilised within degrowth literature. In addition, postcolonial-queer also provides some conceptual similarities in line with the degrowth movement which can help them to form conceptual and theoretical alliances. These two main parts of the thesis will be explored in Chapter 6: Deconstructive Analysis.

In order to carry out the analysis, I use deconstruction as a methodology, since it allows me to deconstruct the degrowth literature and further reconceptualise the concept, through building alliances. The next chapter delves into the methodological underpinnings of this study and the steps I use to carry out Derridian deconstruction.

4. Methodology

In order to contest closures, I employ Derridian deconstruction which is useful in opening up concepts and texts. Below, I explore deconstruction as a methodological tool and the steps that are required to carry out the analysis. Towards the end of this chapter I have included a list of the degrowth literature which is the material for this research.

4.1. A note on deconstruction

For theoretical papers, it is common to use discourse analysis as the methodology as well as a mode of analysis (Bryman 2012:528-539). While discourse analysis can be useful for linguistic as well as conceptual explorations, discourse analysis is better suited for understanding, making visible and deconstructing the power dynamics within discursive spaces (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:3-23). In the case of this paper, I do not want to reveal the power dynamics of the text or the concept, but instead reveal the innate contradictions of the concept itself, and find spaces within the literature that could lead to new conceptual mergers and openings, which deconstruction as a tool allows one to do (Pavlich 2007).

Drawing on the poststructuralist theories, I follow their line of deconstructive thought to explore the degrowth literature and to critically rethink its notion of political economy. The reason to use deconstruction as a methodology is that it allows the study to question the very rationale and logic that the political economy is based on. Hanharan, in her lecture, states that the purpose of deconstruction for Derrida was to question the basis of reason that concepts and institutions were built on (Hanharan 2010). Similarly, Caputo in his famous work, *Deconstruction in a nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, writes that “The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things--texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need--do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy” (Caputo 1997:31). Therefore, as a methodology, deconstruction offers the space to open up the taken-for-granted.

According to Caputo, this mission of opening up is important for Derrida as a means to challenge essentialism and to critique closures. Caputo elaborates that for Derrida, every aspect of human beings including language, institutions, concepts, disciplines and so on is laden with structural meanings and histories (Ibid.). Derrida derives the premises of the language structure from Ferdinand de Saussure. But Derrida challenges the immutability of the words and meanings in Saussure's model, and states that every word/meaning, not only has binary oppositions, but can have multiple meanings. This signifies that there is space, which can be opened up in order to explore all the other possibilities (Ibid.:103-105; Spivak 1976:viii). Caputo gives the example of sexuality; according to Saussure's linguistic structures, it would be divided on the basis of two opposing binaries, "male"/ "female", which denote men and women. In Derridian deconstruction this can be deconstructed by opening up "all the *other* places that this binary scheme closes off" (Caputo 1997:104). Therefore, Caputo states, that the 'third gender' not only challenges the two opposing binaries but also opens up the whole male/female, masculine/feminine structure, to not just the third gender, but innumerable possibilities of sexualities (Ibid.:105).

4.2. The steps to deconstruction

According to Derrida, deconstruction is a way of reading. Therefore, he talks about two levels of reading, one being the first reading, and second being the 'deconstructive' reading (Caputo 1996:76-78). The first reading entails a preliminary engaging with the text, wherein the ideas and structures of the text are reproduced. The second reading is a deconstructive reading, which entails noting down the tensions, silences and the contradictions that can become visible within the text (Ibid.). The deconstruction of the concepts then leads to new openings and possibilities (Ibid.:96). For example, queer scholars have deconstructed the idea of

heterosexuality and the gender binary within popular as well as classical texts, and hence, dismantle heteronormative⁹ foundations (such as Butler 1990).

Before laying out the steps that I follow in order to deconstruct the political economy within degrowth, I briefly explain the limitations I faced during this process. First of all, reading Derrida (1976) as well as scholars that have famously used Derrida such as Spivak (1988) did not provide well laid out steps on how to carry out deconstruction. This made the methodology as well as the method rather vague to be applied. Yet, through Caputo's *Deconstruction in a nutshell* and by reading the works of scholars who had used deconstructive analysis (such as Spivak 1988; Butler and Athanasiou 2013), I was able to formulate few steps in order to carry out the analysis.

Many scholars have used Derridian deconstruction in different interpretative ways (for e.g. Spivak (1988) and Hansen 2006)). For this study, I am inspired by the work of Spivak, who problematizes the idea of 'representing the subaltern' inherent in the writings of Marx, Deuluze and Guattari, Foucault and subaltern studies theorists such as Guha, by bringing in postcolonial works of Said and others (Spivak 1988). In this thesis, I engage with the poststructural theories to provide deconstructed and open up understandings of the political economy.

For this study, I follow the two steps of reading. The first reading is presented in the next chapter and comprises of brief summaries (from the degrowth literature) of all the main tenets that are relevant for this study. The second, deconstructive reading follows in Chapter 6 and presents the main analytical arguments of this thesis. In order to perform this deconstructive reading following steps have been used. First, Caputo writes that "A deconstructive reading, Derrida says, always settles into the distance between what the author consciously intends or means to say (*vouloirdire*), that is, what she "commands" in her text, and what she does not command, what is going on in the text, as it were, behind her back and so "sur-

⁹ ⁹ Heteronormativity – this is a common expression used within queer literature. It points to the dichotomy of male/female, which further prescribes the domains of masculinity and femininity, and as Caputo states it becomes a closure to other types of sexuality (Caputo 1997:105) as well as reinforces how 'men' and 'women' are required to act, speak, dress, etc.

prises," over-takes, the author herself. That distance, or gap, is something the deconstructive reading must "*produce*" (Caputo 1997:78). In other words, Derrida states that every text contains inner contradictions and gaps or missing parts which the author may not have intended. This framework of noting gaps, or rather silences and contradictions is used in the second reading of the degrowth literature.

Secondly, the silences or contradictions within the material will be noted while keeping in line with the critical perspectives from the theoretical framework of this study. This step, of bringing together the deconstructive reading and the theories helps the study to streamline the analytical arguments. Thirdly, I use the theories to deconstruct the understanding of political economy within the degrowth literature. The fourth step involves extracting the main themes or trajectories from the degrowth literature that illustrates these silences and contradictions within the chosen material.

Despite the complexity which is inherent in Derridian deconstructive reading, this method allows me to carry out the purpose of this study. It gives the conceptual space to explore the political economy, while it also challenges its rationales and logics and the meanings attached to it. Finally, it allows me to combine the theoretical underpinnings of this study to analyse the degrowth literature.

4.3. The list of material

The texts have been chosen while keeping in mind two key premises, first – the content and secondly, a broad time-span selection. Starting with the content: the selection was made through looking at a wide variety of published articles and books on degrowth, through academic databases: LUBsearch and Google scholar¹⁰. This search was then refined by looking at the texts published by scholars who were associated with the ‘Degrowth circle’ in Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain and the Research and Degrowth academic association in

¹⁰ Google Scholar - http://scholar.google.se/schhp?hl=sv&as_sdt=0,5
 LUBsearch - <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/search/basic?sid=533fa318-697e-4be6-8f1a-db4cd9e0cab5%40sessionmgr107&vid=1&hid=108>

Barcelona. The Barcelona Degrowth circle has become a “centre” for the degrowth movement due to the publication of the book – *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era* (D’Alisa et al. 2015), having a Degrowth Summer School, and as it became a small laboratory for the degrowth movement.

In addition, the primary criteria for selection of the degrowth literature was to gather texts that have become important for the movement and the theory as pedagogical texts which help define and provide understanding of the term degrowth. Therefore, the work published by scholars who are associated with the Barcelona circle are crucial as they lay out the broad meanings and understanding that have come to define degrowth (such as Sekulova et al. 2013; Demaria et al. 2013; D’Alisa et al. 2015; Kallis and March 2015). Furthermore, I also chose to include the book by Serge Latouche, *Farewell to Growth* (2009), which has been a key text in defining degrowth theoretically and a concept.

Secondly, with regard to the time-span selection, I do not include the earliest works that referred to degrowth (such as the works of Andre Gorz and Georgescu-Roegen (1970s)) who were among the first to use the term ‘degrowth’ in order to critique growth. The reason for this exclusion is that I want to focus on how the degrowth movement and literature has come to define itself in contemporary times. The commencement of the first Degrowth International Conference in Paris in 2008 and the Leipzig Conference in 2012 further influenced the degrowth movement, due to the heterogeneous participation, which brought together activists, scholars and students. This has led degrowth to evolve as an interdisciplinary and interpretative concept (Sekulova et al. 2013). Since these two aspects have come to define the degrowth movement, I chose to narrow down the selection of the texts from 2009 to 2015.

The list of the literature¹¹ includes: *Farewell To Growth* by Latouche (2009); ‘Degrowth: from theory to practice’ by Sekulova, Kallis, Rodríguez-Labajos, and Schneider (2013); ‘What is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social

¹¹ The use of the term ‘degrowth literature’ in this study strictly refers to this list of literature.

Movement’ by Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova, and Martinez-Alier, (2013); ‘Civil and Uncivil Actors for a Degrowth Society’ by D’Alisa, Demaria, and Cattaneo (2013); *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for the New Era* edited by D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis (2015)¹²; ‘Imaginarities of Hope: The Utopianism of Degrowth’ by Kallis and March (2015).

Before going into the analysis of this study, it is acknowledged that these are not works of one single author and that there are many different views present within these texts. But the aim of critically engaging with them together is based on the fact that all of them become important works for the discussion of the concept of degrowth.

4.4. The next step

The first reading, which involves the reproduction of the text is presented in the next chapter, it briefly gathers the main arguments present within the degrowth literature. A deconstructive reading of the degrowth literature follows the first reading. In order to organise and structure the deconstructive analysis, I use a thematic analytical frame.

Here, I conclude with two main arguments that are reflected upon in the analysis. First, that the term or the sign of political economy showcases multiple meanings and spaces that can be explored, as it has been illustrated in the theoretical framework, which is important while discussing the analysis. Secondly, the trajectories or themes will be extracted from the degrowth literature while keeping in mind the focus of this study, which is the political economy.

¹² The book contains fifty one entries. Since not all the chapters were relevant for this study, not all of them have been included in this research, yet, degrowth has been deeply explored through this material in the next chapter.

5. First Reading – The degrowth carpet

The carpet of degrowth weaves together numerous issues; the effects of growth and capitalist production on environment as well as the socio-economic realities of growing inequality within the larger discourse of sustainability. This carpet is not only weaved by theories and academics but also with the engagement of activists, practitioners and social movements (D’Alisa et al. 2013:214-220).

In their famous pedagogical text, *‘What is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social Movement’*, which laid out the many concepts in the making of the degrowth movement and theory, Demaria et al. (2013) use the understanding of ‘interpretative frame’. They use this approach in order to capture how other writers, proponents and practitioners of degrowth have used degrowth to combine different streams and critical ideas as well as old and new social movements (Demaria, et al., 2013:191). Demaria et al. call the different interventions into degrowth as “degrowth sources” and state that writers and social movements which have inspired the degrowth movement come from bioeconomics, political and human ecology, critical political economy, anti-utilitarianism, critiques of development, anti-debt movements, local ecological groups, pedestrian rights, bicycle groups, etc. (Demaria et al. 2013:195-201; D’Alisa 2013:213-214).

Degrowth literature has embraced the merging of theory, practice and social movement within the same conceptualisation; this form of theorizing could be seen as a resistance to the imaginary walls built by the academic ethos (very much like the writings of Marxists-feminists or that of post-structural and queer theorists who take along the theory and the political together). Demaria et al. note degrowth as “an example of an activist-led science now consolidating into a concept in academic literature” (Demaria et al. 2013:191). This combining of the theory, social movements, and practice is visible throughout the texts chosen for this study. The degrowth writers, usually begin with a short description of the ideas and notions attached to degrowth, its activist past and present and always tend to illustrate the idea of degrowth through the exemplification of local

initiatives and groups that challenge and exist outside the normative notion of the neo-liberal economy (Latouche 2009; Demaria et al. 2013; Sekulova et al. 2013; D'Alisa et al. 2013; D'Alisa et al. 2015; Kallis and March 2015).

For the purpose of this study and due to the scope of this research, I selectively lay out below the notions and concepts of the political economy within the degrowth literature. The main conceptual understandings, pertaining to political economy, that degrowth engages with involve: critiques of growth and development; capitalism and neoliberalism; a call for re-politicization of environmentalism and economics; and decolonization of the growth obsessed imaginary.

5.1. Anti-growth

The departure point for the critique of growth comes from the disciplines of ecological economics and political ecology that challenges the logic of unlimited growth against the finite resources of the earth (such as Georgescu-Roegen (1971) and Gorz (1980) in (D'Alisa et al. 2015: 30; Latouche 2009:9; Demaria et al. 2013:204; Kallis and March 2015:361)). Further, the degrowth scholars also critique growth from an anti-utilitarian perspective. They derive this notion of anti-utilitarianism from the works of scholars such as Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi (Latouche 2009:13-14; Demaria et al. 2013:197; D'Alisa et al. 2013:197; Romano 2015:21-24). Mauss is famously known as the economic anthropologist who brought in the accounts of gift economy and reciprocity into the scope of classical economics (Romano 2015:21-24). Economic sociologist, Karl Polanyi, noted that the western modern economy has been 'disembedded' (from social links) and instead 'premarket' societies show examples of embedded economies, wherein the economy is embedded with social ties of kinship (Polanyi in Granovetter 1985:482). Anti-utilitarianism has been used to critique individualistic notions of utility maximising beings that growth perceives human beings to be (Romano 2015:22).

The dominance of the ideology of growth in politics and economics is also critiqued and the tool to measure it, which is GDP, is scrutinized. GDP has been

criticized as being an incompetent means to measure human development or to account for ecological damage or socio-economic inequality (O'Neill 2015:103-106; Victor 2015:109-112; Kallis 2015:137-140). Apart from these analytical critiques, degrowth writers also bring in social and psychological effects of a growth based society, such as “bad psychological health, long working hours, congestion and pollution” (Mishan 1967 in Kallis et al. 2015:6).

5.2. Anti-capitalism and anti-neoliberalism

The critique of capitalist production in the degrowth literature is inspired by Marxist writings. The market led capitalist means of production is criticised for creating the obsession of ‘growth for the sake of growth’ (Latouche 2009:16). Despite this borrowing from the Marxist writing, the degrowth literature is also critical of the Marxist notion of growth, because they insist that while Marxists critique capitalism, they do not critique growth or development (Latouche 2009:88-90). Some Marxists are critical of the degrowth literature and accuse them of not explicitly positioning themselves against capitalism and that their critiques of capitalism are not enough (Andreucci and McDonough 2015:62). But there are degrowth writers such as Latouche who state that degrowth society would be logically and fundamentally incompatible with capitalism (Latouche 2009:88; Andreucci and McDonough 2015:62). Latouche also says that degrowth literature does not have to keep repeating the critiques of capitalism which have already been made obvious (Latouche 2009:88-92). Instead as Andreucci and McDonough note, it is important for Latouche that “capitalism should not be fetishized as the principle object of critique, rather, the economic and ‘productivist’ imaginary which underpins it that should be targeted.” (Andreucci and McDonough 2015:62).

Another crucial trajectory that emerges within this critique of capitalism is the notion of commodification. The idea of commodification in the literature has also been borrowed from Marxist notion of “commodification of land and labour” (Conde and Walter 2015:71). The degrowth literature extensively talks about the commodification and the economic valuation of nature (Sorman 2015:41; Gomez-

Baggethun 2015:67-70; Conde and Walter 2015:71-74). Further, Degrowth writers associate mechanisms of green economy and sustainable development with the capitalistic and neoliberal project. They have been distancing themselves from the proponents of sustainable development, as it has been seen as a reformist approach, which is in line with the market economy, whereas degrowth calls for more structural changes (Latouche, 2009:9,36; Demaria, et al., 2013:2010; Kallis et al., 2015:9; Bonauti 2015:25; Martinez-Alier 2015:38; Paulson 2015:48). Sustainable development has been critiqued for being appropriated by the market; Latouche calls the phrase, ‘sustainable development’ as a “catch-all” term and an oxymoron as it is being used by companies to sell their products which claim to be sustainable and promote the idea of sustainable development (Latouche 2009:9-10). Green technology, which aims to solve the ecological problem through technological advancement, is also critiqued. It is seen as a ‘greening of capitalism’ and is more likely to get caught into the Jevon’s paradox. According to the Jevon’s paradox, as more and more new technologies are developed, it will only keep increasing the consumption, investment and production of these technologies, and will not reduce the material and energy consumption levels, and hence the paradox (Martinez-Alier 2015: 38; Sorman 2015:43; Andreucci and Terrence 2015:62; Alcott 2015:121-124).

5.3. Re-politicization of environmentalism and economism

An important factor within degrowth that distinguishes it from other sustainable development and ecological movements is that it calls for the re-politicization of environmentalism and economics (Latouche 2009; Swyngedouw 2015:90-93; Kallis et al. 2015:6). They aim to bring issues such as sustainable development and green technologies under the political scanner. Degrowth further critiques the absolute reliance on technological solutions for the greening of societies, instead it wants to re-imagine visions and alternatives to modern, sustainable and technological development (Kallis et al. 2015:9; Latouche 2009:31-66; Cattaneo 2015:165-168; Calvario and Otero 2015:143-145). Kallis, Demaria and D’Alisa, in the introduction of the book, *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, write that

“degrowth calls for the politicization of science and technology, against the increasing technocratization of politics” and “new models of democratized knowledge production” (Kallis et al. 2015:9). They argue that the discourse around sustainable development has increasingly become apolitical, and technical, and instead it should be re-politicized by bringing it into public discourse. They draw these arguments from political ecology, which has been theorising how the rise of neo-liberalism and the post-Washington consensus has led to more and more depoliticization of the ecological discussions and the political economy. While the “experts” dominate the field, the larger public debate has been excluded (Ibid.:9).

5.4. Decolonization of the growth obsessed imaginary

Further, the notion of decolonizing the imaginary which is dominated by the growth paradigm is also present across the degrowth literature (Latouche 2009:59-65, Kallis et al. 2015:5; Latouche 2015:117-120; Paulson 2015:45). The degrowth movement borrows these ideas from critiques of development (Latouche 2009:59-65; Kallis et al. 2015:5; Escobar 2015:29-32). They talk about the economic divide of global north and the global south, and argue that the global north needs to create ‘ecological and conceptual space’ for the global south to devise its own conceptualisation and definitions of ‘good life’. In this regard, degrowth does not want to define exactly what ‘good life’ is or how it should be imagined, but instead wants to critique the dominant market oriented and consumerist notions of ‘good life’ (Latouche 2015:61; Kallis et al. 2015:5). Therefore, degrowth literature also engages with ideas of ‘voluntary simplicity’, reduction of individual consumption, notions of self-limitations, rethinking ‘good life’, re-imagination of autonomy, as well as urge for local convivial communities (Latouche 2015:31-66; Demaria et al. 2013: 197; Sekulova et al. 2013:1-6; Calvario and Otero 2015:143-145; Deriu 2015:79-82; Alexander 2015:134-136; Gudynas 2015:201-204).

These components that weave together to make the degrowth carpet entail several disciplinary and conceptual threads. Degrowth seeks to tackle issues on various levels, from the global economy of the growth and capitalist imaginary, to the more localised issues of ecological damage and communities. Further, degrowth as a concept brings together theory and praxis under one umbrella in order to build alternative ‘imaginaries’ within science and society (D’Alisa and Kallis 2015:185-188; Kallis et al. 2015:8; Demaria et al. 2015:204).

The next chapter will engage with the literature presented above, to carry out a deconstructive reading of the texts. In addition, the theories presented in the theoretical framework will guide the analysis.

6. Deconstructive Analysis

To organise and structure the analysis I have marked out key themes which have been derived from a deconstructive reading of the degrowth literature. These themes have been extracted keeping in line with the purpose of the thesis. Therefore, the themes relate to and are in a conversation with the political economy, and bring out the nuances and trajectories through which political economy can be opened up. These nuances or details become very crucial for the analysis. As Caputo writes, that the “devil of deconstruction is in the details” (Caputo 1997:201). Therefore, the quotes in this chapter have been very meticulously chosen. And the line of critique and analysis is done at that level of reading, between the lines of what the authors say and yet are not saying (the silences). The deconstructive analysis below a dialogue between the degrowth literature and how it can be critically rethought through the theories presented in the theoretical framework.

6.1. Deconstructing Political Economy within Degrowth

The term ‘degrowth’ itself points to the embeddedness of the economy within it, by challenging the growth paradigm of the twentieth and twenty-first century, it seeks to provide counter narratives of how human life would look without linear

progression of growth and GDP (Latouche 2009; Demaria et al. 2013; D'Alisa et al. 2015; Kallis and March 2015). Through the first reading of the literature (presented in the previous chapter), it becomes clear that degrowth challenges economic growth, capitalism and, neoliberalism. Deconstructive reading reveals that while some logics of the economy are brought under scrutiny, the literature fails to challenge the very basis of the rationale and logics of the political economy. In some sections of the texts, one could observe that the authors imply this critique but they fall short of questioning the rationality of the economy itself and subsequently retain the disciplinary or conceptual closure of the economy, hence, it becomes one of the silences within the literature. For example, the departing point for the critique of the economy within the literature arises from an anti-utilitarian perspective.

While the important works of theorists such as Mauss and Polanyi bring out the critiques of the ahistorical and universality of the western modern political economy, yet they fail to critique the very basic rationales on which the economy is constructed on (Romano 2015:21; Polanyi 1947:96). Moreover, their theories retain the disciplinary closures of the economy, where economy could look different but would still be within its own closure, as it deals with issues of production or distribution (whether it is pre-market or reciprocal and exchange) (Polanyi in Granovetter 1985:482). Therefore, while the works of these theorists have been very insightful, they do not contribute to the aim of this study. Whereas, poststructuralist queer theorist, Butler, criticizes the very disciplinary and conceptual closures of the disciplines. She says, "It may also be that the very sphere of the economic needs to be rethought genealogically. Its separation from the cultural, for instance, by structuralist legacies within anthropology might need to be rethought against those who claim that the very separation of those spheres is a consequences of capital itself." (Butler 2000:277-278 in S. Charusheela 2015: xvi). What Butler does here, is that she not only calls for rethinking the economy from its roots but also argues that the modernist obsession with capital itself could be the reason for the stark boundaries that separate the economic from the

cultural, or the social and the personal. Another evaluation comes from the postcolonial theorist Spivak, who critiques economic analysis for being reductionist and states that it is an “overdetermined enterprise” and that reductionism “was in the interest of a dynamic economic situation requiring that interests, motives (desires), and power (of knowledge) be ruthlessly dislocated” (Spivak 1988:280). In this discussion, Spivak’s observations resonate with Butler’s idea of dislocating and displacing the various aspects of human life, which occurs as a result of these closures. These very separations and dislocations can be contested in order to reimagine the conceptions of society, rationality and normative logics.

To illustrate further on these lines, the below presented quote represents briefly how degrowth departs from the point of anti-utilitarianism:-

“Degrowth is fully part of an anti-utilitarian framework insofar as it pursues the ideal of a society decolonized of the ideology of unlimited growth, an ideology that supposes a direct correlation between an increase in GDP and collective happiness.” (Romano 2015: 23)

In the above quote, degrowth literature not only frames its critique within the paradigm of anti-utilitarianism, but also calls for ‘decolonization’ of the imaginary obsessed with growth and GDP. Here, the problem arises on two accounts. First, to reiterate the earlier argument that, while they critique growth, they fail to challenge the very foundations on what the notion of growth is built on, which are the normative logics of the economy itself. Moreover, one could also argue from a poststructuralist left position, as Butler points out, the normative logics of growth and the economy thrive from the obsession of capital. Secondly, drawing on Griffin’s poststructural theorization, not only is growth embedded with colonial and gendered connotations but the process of studying and applying economic analysis itself is colonized and gendered. These processes guide what and how a signifier such as growth should be defined (Griffin 2011:45-47). Therefore, degrowth’s aim of ‘decolonizing growth’ cannot be achieved without

critiquing the legacies of the Enlightenment, such as rationalities on which they are constructed (as postcolonial queer narratives point to for example, S. Charusheela 2015: xvii-xix). S. Charusheela notes, that values, which are taken-for-granted within economics (in this case – growth), are defined as “Self”, which “is constructed through opposition to a raced, classed, sexed, gendered, colonial Other” (Ibid.:xviii). Hence, I argue that degrowth cannot decolonize the growth paradigm solely based on the theoretical positions of anti-utilitarianism or critiques of development, but instead needs to rethink the rationalities and the logics on which they are built upon.

Having said that, while deconstructive reading it also becomes clear that the degrowth literature does attempt to distance itself from certain notions within economics. In the Foreword of the book, *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, two well know degrowth scholars, Fabrice Flipo and Francois Schneider, who are also the founders and members of Research and Degrowth (R&D), write how ‘economists’ react to the notion of degrowth and state that it is considered a “taboo”; even among heterodox economists, who are critical of liberalism and capitalism. The quote cited below is a continuation of this discussion:-

“Like other scientists, economists adopt a strategy of willful blindness, reducing the object of their research to ensure the manageability and feasibility of their investigation. This is not necessarily wrong. What is wrong is the fixation on certain absolute rules, such as the growth objective, and the production of recommendations that, if they were to be applied, would direct societies down the same narrow path.” (Flipo and Schneider 2015: xxiv-xxv)

Here, degrowth literature clearly distances itself from the discipline of economics. They acknowledge the reductionist analytical frame of the discipline as well as its colonizing missions. Yet, they keep the space of growth within that space of the economy, and hence, it emerges as a closure, both analytically as well as

disciplinarily. Revisiting the Butler-Fraser debate, this is precisely what Butler urges to dismantle, which is to contest the space of production or distribution (or growth) within the political economy (Butler 1997:270). Further, what poststructural IPE (Griffin 2011) and postcolonial-queer theories (Dhawan et al. 2015) bring up is that these components of production and distribution, within the political economy are gendered and racialized, and underlined with socio-cultural normativities and meanings (for e.g. Griffin's account of work being classified as 'women's work' which is seen within the analytical closure of 'informal work' (Griffin 2011:51)). Therefore, the question is not whether such conceptual reductions for analysis are 'right' or 'wrong' but that they embody gendered and colonial closures, which then become proponents of linear growth or unethical production chains.

Flipo and Schneider primarily critique the economists, who are proponents of growth, and state that these 'absolute rules' become prescribed. But what they do not say is that the political economy itself is built on constitutive and prescriptive lines, as Griffin illustrated (Griffin 2011:46-51). Postcolonial-queer-Marxist theorist S. Charusheela writes, "the problem we face is not merely that bourgeois economics gets it wrong. The problem with a modernist episteme such as this that it is *constitutive*..." (S. Charusheela 2015: xix). While it may seem that the former presented quote (by Flipo and Schneider 2015) and the latter one (by S. Charusheela) are talking on the same line, which is the critique of constitutive norms, but the two quotes are on two different plains. While the poststructuralist standpoint critiques and dismantles the very basis of the epistemological frames of the political economy itself, degrowth fails to critique those basic foundations, even though they critique the strict prescriptions of 'absolute rules' that drive growth. Between these close knit spaces of implying these critiques, Derridian deconstructive reading shows what the authors do and do not say directly, hence, exhibit silences.

Another moment of such implication is when the degrowth literature call for "re-politicization" and argues "against technocratization of politics" (D'Alisa et al.

2015:9) and “calls for the decolonization of public debate from the idiom of economism” (Ibid.:3). While it clearly emerges as a way to socialize and politicize the economy and politics; yet a mere call for ‘politicization of the economy’, without questioning the foundational basis of the economy, in turn reifies the disciplinary boundaries even more. Rosamond argues that simply noting the impact of the relation of one domain on the other, in this case the political and the economy, “conjures up not only imagery of the shaping actors within that domain ..., but also reifies the boundaries between” two domains (Rosamond 2006:517-518). Furthermore, as Griffin points out the economic is already inherent with socio-cultural and socio-political complexities, and therefore, is not in distance which needs to be ‘pulled back into’ the political, but instead questioning the very basis of these analytical closures and rationalities can provide new understandings of the political economy (Griffin 2011:53).

The above presented are key moments in the text which highlight how the understanding of political economy is weaved into the degrowth literature. The following line of analysis below departs from this, to illustrate how this closure within degrowth literature leads to other kinds of conceptual and analytical closures.

6.2. Trajectories

These trajectories are from the degrowth literature, which are seen through the lenses of the postcolonial-queer narratives. Hence, they are relevant to this study as they are related to the notion of exploring closures within the understanding of political economy in the degrowth literature.

6.2.1. Care and reproduction = reproducing Male/Female dichotomy

Kallis et al. present an image of a word bubble in the book, *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era* (Kallis et al. 2015:4). The word bubble consists of all the major words which occurred in the book. ‘Growth’, is the biggest word in the bubble, and following that is ‘care’ (Ibid.). The notion of care is presented as an act, which people participate in on a day-to-day basis for themselves and for their

collectivity, which could be family, community and so on (D'Alisa et al. 2015:63). The idea of care within degrowth literature is presented within the context of social reproductive activities, such as 'unpaid work' (Demaria et al. 2013:203; Sekulova et al. 2013:4; Kallis et al. 2015:4; D'Alisa et al. 2015:63; Kallis and March 2015:365). According to the authors, unpaid activities are not accounted for in the market, the political or the economic spaces. These 'unpaid' hours lay outside of the notion of 'productivity' (D'Alisa et al. 2015:63-66). Further, 'unpaid work' is mentioned in the context of the works of feminist economists. The writers state that,

“Unpaid work is the term used in feminist economics to account for the free work devoted to such tasks. Feminists have denounced for years the undervaluation of work for bodily and personal care, and the related undervaluation of the subjects delegated to undertake it, i.e. women.” (Jochimsen and Knobloch 1997 in D'Alisa et al. 2015:63)

Here, the writers elaborate that unpaid work is undervalued and it also creates undervalued subjects, 'women'. While this is an important aspect of political economy, which is not accounted for in narrow means of measurements such as growth (Demaria et al. 2013; D'Alisa et al. 2015; Kallis and March 2013); yet, a poststructuralist deconstructive reading opens up this critique even more. There are two main arguments I bring up within this trajectory. First, the notion of 'women' being the main subjects within the undervaluation of social reproduction and care can lead to reproducing the heteronormative subjectivities. Secondly, the works of feminist economists only appears in the degrowth literature within this framework of care and reproduction. Hence, the critique of growth, capitalism, neo-liberalism as well as the economy which feminist economists have been analysing since decades, is not only marginalised but also overlooked within the literature.

One of the key analytical and conceptual closures inherent in the episteme of political economy is heteronormativity, which not only ignores the multiple

subjectivities, but also enhances and reproduces the binary dichotomies of male and female. Griffin states that apart from being unaccountable for human social reproduction the discipline of political economy also reproduces prescriptive heterosexuality (Griffin 2011:47-50). In the case of degrowth literature, they give space to unpaid work and urge the need to make it visibilised. Yet, in this process, they keep the 'women' within that space (care, social reproduction and unpaid work), further enhancing the subjectivity of 'women'. Moreover, as Butler points out, heteronormative closures are not only socio-culturally prescribed and reproduced, but the political economy can recreate these walls between the 'real' economy and the 'outside' (Butler 1997:268). While degrowth correctly points out that care and social reproduction lay 'outside', but in the process of equating that space with 'women' and feminist scholarship, they reproduce the heteronormative closures of the binary dichotomy of male/female spaces.

The second critique is about the use of feminist scholarship itself, which is only associated with care and reproduction (see, Demaria et al. 2013; D'Alisa et al. 2015; Kallis and March 2013). In addition to that, the degrowth literature also ignores other analytical contributions of feminist literature (such as Fraser's critiques of capitalism and neoliberalism (1995), and many other critical feminist scholars, Federici (2014)). This marginalises the feminist scholarship within degrowth literature and overlooks important critiques of the political economy as well as growth by feminists. Moreover, correlating this discussion to the previous section, degrowth cannot decolonize the growth obsessed imaginary without decolonizing the closures present within the economy such as male/female binary and prescribed notions of heterosexuality (Griffin 2011; Dhawan et al. 2015).

6.2.2. Materiality of nature and bodies

By commodification and economic valuation, the degrowth literature refers to the price or the cost of production or extraction that is imposed on natural resources, which is decided by its value in the financial market. A classic example is of land, especially within Marxist literature which talks about the transformation of common land into private (Gomez-Baggethum 2015:68). The degrowth literature

heavily criticizes the emergence of ‘nature’ as a form of commodified ‘capital’ and states that human-nature relation needs to be rethought and reimagined in order to create more sustainable future. Moreover, the degrowth literature frames the idea of human-nature relation within the concept of ‘social metabolism’, which refers to the power relations of the humans on nature, that controls the flow of resources and energy (Sorman 2015:41). Further, growth is critiqued for being the driving force behind such power structures, which requires the need to extract and capitalise everything for progressive growth (Latouche 2009; Demaria et al. 2013; D’Alisa et al. 2015; Kallis and March 2013). While the presence of this critique is widely visible within all the degrowth texts, the notion of labour, the commodification and capitalisation of human beings into human capital is less visible. Work and labour are talked about in terms of a more prescriptive manner (such as, work sharing – wherein, in a degrowth society, work will be shared in order to decrease working hours and increase leisure time (Schor 2015:195), or Latouche calls for “jobs for all in a de-growth society” (Latouche 2015:76)). To elaborate on this focus of the human-nature relation, the quote below captures the understanding of ‘social metabolism’ in the degrowth literature.

“Societal metabolism focuses on the biophysical processes that guarantee the production and consumption of goods and services: what is produced, how it is produced, the purpose for which it is produced, and by whom it is consumed.” (Sorman 2015:42)

Here, the author briefly traces out the cycle of production and consumption, keeping in line with the idea of the use of natural resources. Yet, a crucial element which remains silent is the question of ‘by whom it is produced?’. As Griffin (2011:54) and Heiliger (2015:200) highlight, the political economy (in this case growth and human-nature relation) cannot be seen independent of the bodies that comprise it. Hence, I would argue that merely critiquing the capitalising and commodifying effects of modern political economy on nature or human beings are not enough, and that the *embodied* approach within feminist and poststructural scholarship can bring out two key factors into the discussion of political economy

for the degrowth movement. First, that human bodies become spaces where commodification by the market is inscribed upon, meaning that, within the notion of natural and social metabolism, bodies need to be accounted for as spaces which are embedded within complex web of power relation. For example, as Griffin points out, within the paradigm of production, ‘human productivity’ is built on the notion of prescribing bodies of what is expected of them and how they are expected to perform and be (Griffin 2011:50). Therefore, within this cycle of production, both nature and bodies play crucial parts, and simplified models of production processes can overlook the complex embodiment of the components it is built upon.

Secondly, postcolonial-queer analytical narratives can deepen the complexity of processes such as production chains and commodification. Klapeer and Schönplflug, postcolonial-queer-Marxist theorist, not only critique the Lockean notion of private property but also “queer commodification” (Klapeer and Schönplflug 2015:170). They argue that what and who gets commodified depends on the socio-economic as well as gendered and racial hierarchies. For Klapeer and Schönplflug, the boundaries between human and non-human, nature and culture need to be challenged in order to overcome the prescriptive notions of commodification, individualistic understandings of autonomy and heteronormativity (Ibid.:172-173). Therefore, I argue that to critique the effects of commodification and capitalisation, degrowth needs to contest the closures which separate human and nature embodiments that are entangled within the notion of social metabolism and production chains.

6.2.3. Colonized alternative imaginaries

“Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized” – (Chatterjee 1993:5)¹³

Within this trajectory I would like to argue that ‘even the alternative imaginaries seem to be colonized’. As presented above, degrowth urges the need to decolonize

¹³ This quote is from the prominent postcolonial theorist, Chatterjee, where he critiques Benedict Anderson’s notion of ‘imagined communities’, and states that the model of a nation-state does not need to be imagine on the same lines as it exists in the west (Chatterjee 1993).

the imaginary from the clutches of growth. Further, the degrowth writers clearly state how the degrowth movement does not want to prescribe what and how degrowth should be approached in the Global South. Instead they state that the Global North should degrow in order to pave way for Global South, so that it can use resources to develop its infrastructure and living standards (Latouche 2009:62; Escobar 2015:31). Writers such as Latouche insist that spaces in Global South already have movements and ways of living which can inspire degrowth movement (Latouche 2009:60-65; and others mention alternative imagined spaces such as *Beun Vivir* in South America and *Ubuntu* in South Africa (Gundynas 2015:201; Ramose 2015:212; Kallis et al. 2015:5).

Despite this, there are spaces within the degrowth literature which are embedded with colonial notions, which either romanticise or patronize the ways of living of the ‘distant other’ or victimize them, hence, presenting contradiction within the texts. The below presented quote is one such example, where, in the process of ‘giving voice’ it reproduces the notions of the ‘victimized other’.

“Poor people do not always think and behave as environmentalists. To believe this would be blatant nonsense. The environmentalism of the poor arises from the fact that the world economy is based on fossil fuels and other exhaustible resources, going to the ends of the earth to get them, disrupting and polluting both pristine nature and human livelihoods, encountering resistance by poor and indigenous peoples who are often led by women. Poor and indigenous peoples sometimes appeal for economic compensation but more often they appeal to other languages of valuation such as human rights, indigenous territorial rights, human livelihoods, and the sacredness of endangered mountains or rivers.” (Martinez-Alier 2015:37)

In the above presented quote, Martinez-Alier describes what he calls ‘environmentalism of the poor’ or “mantra of environmental justice” (Martinez-Alier 2015:37). ‘Environmentalism of the Poor’ is one of currents within the

environmentalist movements and it refers to the conflict by the indigenous and local communities against resource extraction and occupation of common resources by state and private enterprises (Ibid.:39). While it is an analytical category that Martinez-Alier makes in order to capture the wide environmentalist movements that take place on different levels; here, unintentionally he classifies 'these indigenous and poor' people within a colonial closure. I deconstruct this line of thought with two main arguments. First, is the postcolonial critique which Spivak presents in her classic essay, 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1988), she dismantles the way theorists represent the distant 'others'. Spivak writes that in the process of academic writing and with the intention of giving space and voice to the 'others', not only does the academia build closures that keep 'these' voices out but also reinforces the imperial gaze of being forever essentialised and victimized as the 'subaltern'. In the quote by Martinez-Alier, not only does he explicitly demarcate the space between the 'poor and indigenous' and 'environmentalists'. But in this process of a demarcated terminology of 'poor and indigenous', he essentialises all the 'poor and the indigenous' together without realising the intersections of heterogeneity. Further as Spivak provokingly writes, "And the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever" (1988:295); these descriptions of poor, indigenous and women's consciousness (in this case environmental consciousness) reinforces their subjectivity within such writings.

My second critique revisits the Butler-Fraser debate. Apart from constructing the closures on representative lines, Martinez-Alier also signifies separate spaces for economic compensation (redistribution) and the 'poor and indigenous' appeal for human rights, indigenous territorial rights, sacred mountains, and so on (recognition). This analytical closure, as Butler convincingly argued, leads to reducing and simplifying demands of recognition and are seen independent of the economic. Such arguments create a hierarchy of the demands of 'poor and indigenous'; for instance, Martinez-Alier writes that "more often" than not, 'they' ask for rights of recognition over economic compensation. This underlines the assumption that the spaces of these demands and the demands for economic

compensation exists separately in a vacuum. Whereas, as Butler points out, the lines between political economic and cultural rights cannot be viewed as being separate from each other and exist within a complex whole simultaneously (Butler 1997:273). Therefore, I argue that degrowth's notion of creating alternative imaginaries needs to be decolonized on a deeper level. The degrowth movement cannot decolonize imaginaries by merely critiquing the colonized imaginaries of growth and consumption obsessed societies, but instead needs to self-reflect and be self-critical on how the distant 'others' and 'their' ways of living are represented within the degrowth alternative imaginary.

6.3. Building Alliances

Despite having laid out these critiques about the degrowth literature, what is very interesting about the concept of degrowth is that it brings together many diverse ideas, disciplines and approaches that tackle interstices of nature, culture, political economy, including emotions of happiness and conviviality (Sekulova 2015:113-116). The literature itself is composed by a wide myriad of scholars, who come from different theoretical and disciplinary ontologies. Moreover, deconstructive reading, through poststructural lens helps in bringing out the silences and the inner contradictions of the texts and further adds self-reflexivity to the degrowth movement. But the deconstructive reading also reveals spaces within the degrowth literature which can contribute to the theoretical schools presented within this study. I frame this section within the notion of 'building alliances', inspired by the last section of *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era* (D'Alisa et al. 2015); the last part of the book is called 'Alliances', and consists of contributions by different scholars that weave in conceptual notions of different movements into the fabric of degrowth, for example, Gudynas brings in the idea of *Beun Vivir*, Ramose talks about Ubuntu and how these movements can form alliances with the degrowth movement (Gudynas 2015:201; Ramose 2015:212). Therefore, in this segment of the analysis, I explore how degrowth can contribute to the discipline of Critical International Political Economy and queer theory.

Firstly, even though degrowth fails to challenge the very basic rationales of political economy, yet it does bring up a lot of important critiques on the issue of opening up closures. Going back to the theoretical framework, in this study, critical IPE scholar, Bruff urges the discipline to challenge the analytical closures of the state/market dichotomy, present within the study of IPE (Bruff 2011:83). The degrowth literature gives many examples of spaces which defy this state/market dichotomy. For example, one of the imperatives which is mentioned under the ‘degrowth transition’ is the need to create spaces which do not impose on people the absolute rules of the market or the state (Kallis et al. 2015:14). One example of a model of degrowth society are eco-communities. According to Cattaneo eco-communities are built by people, in rural or urban spaces, to live together in a sustainable manner with a degree of direct democracy and being autonomous, in terms of self-sufficiency (Cattaneo 2015:165). Yet another example is of trashpicking which queer theorist, Heiliger presents, wherein people sustain their lives through picking goods from waste (Heiliger 2015:196). The study of such interstices could challenge the state/market dichotomy within IPE, since they do not clearly lie within or outside the state and the market, but within alternative spaces that are complex and cannot be analytically reduced into state or market. The degrowth literature also brings up the rising problem of debt, especially since the global financial crisis of 2008 (Mellor 2015:175). Writers such as Mellor (2015), Asara and Muraca (2015) bring up movements that question the rising public debt, and urge the state to shift their investment from financial markets to the public sector. Asara and Muraca write that the ‘indignados’ (occupy) movement in Barcelona demanded for “the refusal of bail-out for banks, a citizens’ audit of the debt, public education, economic redistribution and basic income, work redistribution, the refusal of precarious work, and the valuation of reproductive, domestic, i.e. care work.” (Asara and Muraca 2015:170). These movements also bring out the blurring of lines of the state/market dichotomy and can highlight spaces where state/market nexus is more clearly visible. Such movements challenge this nexus and can provide new theoretical and analytical insights for critical IPE to challenge its analytical

closures (feminist scholars within IPE have been bringing up such complexities, for e.g. Federici (2014:231-244)).

Secondly, I would like to draw parallels between the new emergence of postcolonial-queer scholarship, that brings together different schools of thought such as poststructuralism and Marxist theories, and degrowth. The two share similar notions of critiquing the taken-for-granted of modernist episteme such as growth, private property; and bring up the issue of socio-economic and environmental justice (D'Alisa et al. 2015; Dhawan et al. 2015). Moreover, both occupy the space of the 'other', in relation to mainstream economics and political economy; hence, the coming together of these two frames of thought can create more analytical and theoretical contributions to challenge the conceptual and disciplinary closures within academia. Further, Heiliger's account of trashpicking can also be viewed through the degrowth lens of challenging the consumption and growth based society (Heiliger 2015:195). In addition, the idea of re-using waste and hence decreasing the amount of waste could be part of a degrowth society as well. Klapeer and Schönplflug's queer critique of private property and the need to increase common resources is also resonated within the degrowth literature (Helfrich and Bollier 2015:75). Therefore, not only can postcolonial-queer theory build alliance with the degrowth movement, but can also provide its analytical tools to aid critical framework to counter growth and the closures of political economy. Likewise, the postcolonial-queer-Marxist scholarship can draw on degrowth to find spaces that defy market norms and urge for alternative imaginaries. As Klapeer and Schönplflug point out, class as a social category has been latent within queer scholarship (Klapeer and Schönplflug 2015:163), hence, the notions of socio-economic justice within degrowth can provide new socio-economic and socio-cultural notions to create new understandings of justice. Another important closure that degrowth challenges is of theory, praxis and social movements which is a crucial taken-for-granted notion within academia. By bringing these different dimensions to academic writing they bridge the gap under "activist-led-science" (Demaria et al. 2013:191).

To conclude this analytical discussion, a deconstructive reading of the degrowth literature brings to light the spaces within the texts that can be rethought through the poststructural lenses of postcolonial-queer and critical IPE theories. The main arguments presented above were that: first, the understanding of political economy within degrowth can be opened up through challenging its conceptual closures and can further provide the degrowth movement to be self-critical and self-reflexive. The disciplinary closure of the economy, present within the degrowth literature can be dismantled by rethinking that not only is growth colonized and gendered, but the episteme of political economy is itself colonized and gendered. Second, deconstructive reading also helps illuminate the utterances within the degrowth literature that can reproduce heteronormative closures of male/female domains and in the process also marginalizes feminist scholarship with the degrowth discussion. Third, a poststructural queer embodied approach can enrich the discussion of social metabolism by accounting for the human bodies that embody social markings of gender, class, sexuality, disability, race, etc. Fourth, in the process of building and envisioning alternative imaginaries it is crucial to be self-reflexive about colonial legacies that tend to exist within critical notions as well. Even though, many more silences and utterances within degrowth literature can be deconstructed, degrowth poses important questions for research, that transcend disciplinary and conceptual closures. Thus, it can provide different spaces in the academia with interesting ways to rethink closures, for e.g. degrowth societies can challenge the classic dichotomy of state/market inherent within IPE (Bruff 2011). The interpretative frame of degrowth, helps it to build alliances with poststructural and postcolonial-queer narratives and it can contribute to further contest closures and to reimagine alternative imaginaries that entail justice.

Further Explorations

The process of Derridian deconstruction entails the endless possibilities of exploring numerous spaces within texts that can be deconstructed and reconstructed. Therefore, it is acknowledged that within the scope of this research

and purpose, only some aspects of the political economy within degrowth literature have been deconstructed. It is also acknowledged that the method of deconstruction is broad and interpretative and hence the deconstructive reading presented here reflects my own positionality and biases.

Future research can help bring out the taken-for-granted notions within academia that can be challenged and reflected upon. Revisiting Butler's call for a genealogical questioning of the economy (Butler 2000 in S. Charusheela 2015:xvi); a genealogical tracing of the analytical closures within the economy and the political economy itself can be explored. Moreover, genealogical mapping of the power relations inherent within the term 'degrowth' could also be pursued. Furthermore, the coming together of poststructural, postcolonial, queer and Marxist theories can reveal and contest more conceptual closures. These new streams of theoretical schools can deconstruct and reconstruct new imaginaries.

7. Conclusion

Within the ongoing discussion of the degrowth movement and theory, this study has critically engaged with some of the degrowth literature. While the degrowth paradigm explores multiple levels of theories, the focus of this study has been the understanding the political economy within degrowth. This frame allowed the study to bring in a range of theoretical arguments within the scope of this research. Further, a deconstructive reading of the degrowth texts, that were specifically chosen for this study, was able to illuminate the silences and innate contradictions present within the literature.

As Butler states in 'Merely Cultural', poststructural theories have been undermined due to the assumption that they entail "destructive, relativistic, and politically paralyzing" (Butler 1997:265-266) connotations within its questioning of the taken-for-granted. However, this thesis has shown that poststructural theories can be crucial in highlighting the colonial and gendered underpinnings within the taken-for-granted concepts. By dismantling the disciplinary and

conceptual closures of the political economy, poststructural theories are able to bring out counter narratives of the constitutive modernist episteme. While on the one hand, the critiques raised by Butler, against Fraser's analytical distinctions, are crucial to contest the disciplinary closure of the political economy. On the other hand, postcolonial-queer-Marxist theory not only highlights the coming together of two highly influential schools of thought within academia, but is also able to create a more self-reflexive space within research that can account for the complex issues of class, caste, sexuality, gender, disability, and race. In this research, both the Butler-Fraser debate and postcolonial-queer narratives have provided key premises for the deconstruction of the degrowth literature.

Derridian deconstructive reading has aided the methodological and ontological purpose of this study, by providing the conceptual space to open up degrowth literature and the political economy. By combining the process of deconstructive reading as well as theoretical resources, I was able to deconstruct the understanding of the political economy within degrowth. This further led to other spaces within the degrowth literature that comprised of conceptual closures. These trajectories were then opened up in line with the theoretical underpinnings of this study.

Despite its recent emergence in academia, degrowth has emerged as an important concept for the social sciences to engage with, because it tackles several issues on different plains of theory, social movement and practice. It is informed, guided and framed by critical discourses within academia, such as post-development critiques, Marxist, eco-feminists, etc. Yet, this study has shown that critical discourses can entail and reproduce gendered and colonial baggage within its folds. Finally, to conclude, opening up the theoretical and analytical closures within degrowth literature, with the help of poststructural theories such as postcolonial-queer theory and poststructural critical IPE, can not only further challenge the epistemic taken-for-granted notions; but it can also pave the way for emerging concepts such as degrowth to form alliances with these non-normative

theoretical frameworks in order to envision more decolonized alternative imaginaries within and outside research.

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