

Conviviality and Conscience:

How Degrowth and Abolition Theory Critique and Re-envision Welfare States



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Jillian Fields-Hirschler

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Supervisor: Max Koch

Department of Social Work

Abstract

Abolition theory and degrowth theory address important issues in the social-political world. An emergent discipline (in academia), abolition theory carefully dissects the ideological and historical underpinnings of the current system of police and prisons in the United States and offers a systematic critique of their impact. Abolitionist scholars and activists also offer a creative framework for envisioning a world without police and prisons, one not dominated by carceral logics, police violence, and community isolation. Degrowth theory is an academic challenge of economic growth in the 'Global North.' It offers a plethora of critique on the logics of growth-based economies and their impacts, with a particular concern for the ecological unviability of the unlimited growth paradigm that currently exists. This paper seeks to put these two theories in conversation through a qualitative comparative framework analysis of how they critique the welfare state and envision new realities. The results are analyzed through the lenses of sociological imagination and a socio-ecological model. The results suggest further research is needed to fully integrate the two theories but that this sampling of literature does lay a foundation for the two to be compared.

Keywords: Abolition, Degrowth, Anti-capitalism, Post-growth, Welfare Critique

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Problem & Purpose

“Remember to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the worlds you cannot live within.” –Ruha Benjamin

Degrowth and Abolition are two very radical theories that propose drastic changes to the world in which we live. They each call for a reimagining of both our material lifestyles and our relationships to community, care work, the planet, and environment. They do this through proposing reconstruction of some set of systems (in the case of degrowth it is economic growth, for abolition it is police and prisons), but they also engage in the creative and critical imagining of what should *replace* these systems. Despite being radical frameworks grounded in both anti-capitalist and social justice theories, the two do not yet cooperate significantly in the academic or grassroots literature available. When I initially searched my university system with the keywords abolition and degrowth, it yielded just three results. A google search with these same terms brings only one additional article to these three. This is worthy of inquiry for two reasons. My hypothesis is first and foremost that these two theories are fundamentally compatible and working off similar assumptions; for this reason alone one would expect some cooperation. Secondly, I believe that the core principles in each framework could help strengthen the other. For example, the racial analysis of abolition could be integrated to enhance the liberatory potential of degrowth and a sharpened connection to climate justice could enhance the arguments for abolition. Further, could these two concepts have enough in common that an integrated theory could emerge? I am interested in answering this question and helping to bridge the gap between these two conceptual frameworks through a systematic review of literature on both topics.

As a social worker and welfare studies student, I am particularly interested in the ways in which different theories and frameworks both critique and reimagine the welfare state. Welfare states all over the world are facing tremendous pressure. As I write, France's neoliberal government is under fire (both literally and figuratively) for raising the pension age, the UK is struggling to assist its people with the cost-of-living crisis, and the United States continually struggles to provide some semblance of a welfare state beyond a robust prison system. Governments everywhere must grapple with the impending climate crisis, migration, racial justice, and struggles for adequate resource distribution. Two theories grappling with these realities, albeit in their own unique ways, and offering possible paths forward are degrowth and abolition.

It is imperative that scholars in the social work field constantly strive for both racially and environmentally just solutions to both systemic and interpersonal challenges and both degrowth and abolition have a lot to offer in this realm. Abolition is a powerful theory borne out of the movement for the abolition of the institution of slavery in the United States (Davis, 2003) and degrowth is a radical theory that fundamentally critiques the institution of economic growth (Kreinen & Aiger, 2022). Due to their radical nature they have both, in different ways and to varying degrees, faced ridicule, down-playing, and disregard by public policy and governance officials. In many ways both are considered to be “pie-in-the-sky,” overly-idealistic, and impractical agendas to achieve. This is to be expected when the theories directly critique the systems that help maintain global white supremacy and protect capital accumulation over human life. They take on huge, deeply-rooted industries; police and prisons (and sometimes military) and fossil fuels, aviation, and finance to name a few. They challenge our paradigms about safety, deservingness, humanity, and greed. I have seen even the most progressive policy makers and

government officials shy away from these words because they threaten the very funders, lobbyists, and powerhouses they ultimately answer to. As a social worker who has worked in direct service with immigrants, refugees, racialized and marginalized people in the US I am uninterested in debating the claims that people have been making for centuries that these systems are oppressive. In my country alone, Black and brown people have been screaming the issues at those of us with power for far too long. With people dying at the hands of police with alarming regularity, with almost two million people involved in the US criminal justice system (Sawyer & Wagner, 2023) and with the planet being already nearly unlivable in many places due to the effects of climate change, debating the existence of these oppressions is disrespectful. Instead, this research will seek to bring these radical ideas forward and use them to illustrate potential equitable futures for welfare states because taken together, these two frameworks forge important and powerful pathways for critiquing and re-imagining the welfare state.

The purpose of this research will be to examine how each theory critiques the welfare state as it stands now; what are the core, central issues they perceive with the way the welfare state functions? Secondly, to examine what solutions and improvements in the welfare state each theory proposes. Through this comparative analysis I hope to consider how a world without economic growth and without police and prisons might impact the welfare state— a question I feel is radical and important as we in the ivory tower continue to stumble towards providing intellectualized foundations for tangible, real-world change.

1.2 Thesis Structure

This thesis follows the following structure. First, an overview of the theories to be studied is presented, with the hope that the reader will then be equipped to understand the next section

which is a review of previous research. This is then followed by an overview of theory and concepts used to both shape the study and understand its results. Next, a review of the methodology utilized, ethical considerations and limitations of the study is discussed. The results from the data collection are presented along with an analysis and discussion. The conclusion finalizes the paper with a review of the material and a note for future research.

1.3 Overview of the theories to be studied

McDowell and Fernandez (2018) in one of the few highly academic reviews of abolition, “‘disband, disempower, and disarm’: Amplifying the theory and practice of police abolition,” highlight that amongst the different approaches to and strategies for abolition, the definition proposed by the organization Critical Resistance is the most apt: “abolition is understood as both “a practical organizing tool” and a long-term vision to build ‘lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment’” (pg. 377). Abolition theory engages in both paradigm challenge and building up of liberatory praxis. Not only do abolitionists wish to dismantle the policing and prison systems, they want to build a society so well resourced, communal, and safe that police and prisons are unnecessary. It should be noted that while there are tenable abolitionist movements in places outside the U.S., namely Ireland and Britain (Abolitionist Futures, 2023) most abolitionist scholarship is borne from Black and Indigenous scholars and activists in the United States. As such, it should be assumed that, unless otherwise stated, abolitionists reference a U.S. context and applicable cultural and historical contextualization would be needed for it to be applied elsewhere.

Some of the literature engages in critical reflection on the socio-political and economic factors that allow for police and prisons to flourish and some theorizes about strategies to replace

the system of policing. Abolition is complex because it proposes several different strategies to achieve its goal, but at their core each holds a vision for a world without the harm police cause and instead with robust systems of care. Esteemed abolition scholar Angela Davis describes: “the primary project of abolition is not “a negative process of tearing down,” but rather one of collectively “re-imagining institutions, ideas, and strategies, and creating new institutions...that render prisons obsolete” (McDowell, Fernandez; 75). This is described as the “political theory” perspective according to McDowell and Fernandez as it not only seeks to uproot existing systems but in doing so “challenges the legitimacy of the status quo” (pg. 377). Abolitionists are often touted as naive and irresponsible as their positions are sometimes misrepresented as abruptly abandoning everyone to chaos and violence. Abolitionist literature and organizing point to quite the contrary, however, as there are many publications on the deliberate and thoughtful visions abolitionists hold for what a transformed society would look like and how to get there (8toAbolition 2020, Critical Resistance 2021). In an article called “What Abolitionists Do” by Dan Berger, Mariame Kaba, and David Stein for Jacobin in 2017, they claim: “Abolitionists refuse to abide the paradigm where “prisons [serve] as catchall solutions to social problems,” as Ruth Wilson Gilmore has put it.” It is precisely through this organizing for better responses to “social problems” that abolitionists find their praxis. In “Building an Abolitionist Queer and Trans Movement With All We’ve Got” (Bassichis et al., 2011) a seminal essay co-authored by legal scholar and activist Dean Spade, they write about the transformative aspirations of abolitionists:

“Abolition is not some distant future but something we create in every moment when we say no to the traps of empire and yes to the nourishing possibilities dreamed of and practiced by our ancestors and friends. Every time we insist on accessible and affirming

healthcare, safe and quality education, meaningful and secure employment, loving and healing relationships, and being our full and whole selves, we are doing abolition.

Abolition is about breaking down things that oppress and building up things that nourish.

Abolition is the practice of transformation: in the here and now and the ever after” (pg. 36).

Further on in this thesis, the exact mechanisms proposed by abolitionists are explored thematically, alongside a more detailed explanation of their critiques. Of interest to this section, however, is one of the main points of departure for abolitionists: capitalism and its intertwinedness with racism.

Abolitionists use a race-conscious framework in understanding how police came to be a legitimized and insidious institution in the U.S., pointing to their history as slave patrols and involvement over time to defend capitalist’s interests. Precisely because police in America were created initially to catch the enslaved African people who had been kidnapped to perform chattel slavery on behalf of the economic interests of white slave owners, they’ve never strayed too far from that original purpose, even as racial dynamics and economics have changed. McDowell and Fernandez quote the anonymous collective “For a World Without Police” to illuminate this point:

“[t]he police force was created to repress the growing numbers of poor people that accompanied the rise of industrial capitalism, while on plantations and in agricultural colonies, [the police] formed in response to the threat of slave revolt.’ Their analysis outlines the core functions of policing under racial capitalism: protect the property of the capitalist class; maintain stable conditions for capital accumulation; and defend against any threats to these unequal conditions of rule (For a World Without Police 2016; see also Williams 2015; Whitehouse 2014).” (pg. 379)

Therefore, the abolitionist position is made further complex by its staunchly anti-capitalist framework. Recognizing that not only was the police force formed under pretenses of racialized capitalism, but persists in ultimate service to its continued interests, abolitionists critique the very foundation upon which police authority rests. They argue that a world without police, then, is one that fundamentally must change, “since removing [the police’s] ability to inflict violence prevents the police from maintaining capitalist exploitation and oppression” (For a World Without Police 2016)” (McDowell, Fernandez, pg. 381). This argument is compelling as it encourages a complete re-imagining of social care and relationship to labor and capital that would change our human ecology. The abolitionist question is this: in a society not dominated by carceral logics, how do we relate to one another, our communities, our environments, and our future?

If one is familiar with degrowth theory, or “post-growth” society framework, these questions might sound familiar if you were to change a few words. In essence, the degrowth question is: in a society not dominated by economic growth, how do we relate to one another, our communities, our environments, and our future? Nevertheless, degrowth is a slightly more difficult framework to precisely describe. Degrowth theory, as outlined in Demaria’s article *‘What is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social Movement’* (2013), is incredibly diverse in its theory and practice. It can be thought of as an umbrella term that encompasses many different frameworks. At its core, however, Demaria proposes that “degrowth challenges the hegemony of growth and calls for a democratically led redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialized countries as a means to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice and well-being” (pg. 209). Degrowth “challenges the hegemony of growth”: this delineates that there is a western concept of growth that has become the norm that degrowth

seeks to uproot. Demaria refers to these as the ideas of “green growth” or “sustainable development” (pg. 209); many degrowth scholars and activists challenge the idea that further growth of any ecological standard is a worthy pursuit (pg. 209). According to Saave and Muraca (2021), “The French term *décroissance* was introduced by André Gorz to address the incompatibility between the capitalist system and the earth balance and later established by Georgescu-Roegen as an alternative to zero-growth or steady-state (D’Alisa et al. 2015; Muraca 2013)” (pg. 744). Instead of seeing the earth or environment as a substrate of the economy, degrowth theorists seek to revise this narrative to one of where the economy is adjusted to fit within the “biophysical limits of the planet” (Andreoni & Galamari, 2013, pg. 78). This fundamental shift is key to the degrowth debate as it requires a reconception of most systems, discourses, and practices on every level of society. Such large-scale change has significant opportunity for corruption and in acknowledgement of this central to degrowth theories is that the changes must be democratic, voluntary, redistributive, and aimed at both production and consumption; this dimension allows for a plethora of strategies. The focus on human “well-being” is crucial, “while in the [neoclassical economy] well-being is generally reduced to consumption opportunities and assumes human relations functional to the economy (producer–consumer relationship), degrowth theory considers that other factors like social relationships, environmental quality and health, influence human well-being” (Andreoni & Galamari, 2013, pg. 78). It is also important to note that the emphasis in degrowth theory is on industrialized countries, an acknowledgement that the “Global North” must atone for its disproportionate impacts on the “Global South” (Demaria, pg. 200). In summary, degrowth theory fundamentally critiques the paradigm of growth and calls for a revised society in which the central tenets include living within planetary boundaries. Understanding the gravity of

change that would need to occur in every aspect of life, degrowth also “explores alternative ways of living together besides and beyond the capitalist growth diktat. What is at stake is not so much doing less of the same, but envisioning a ‘society with a metabolism which has a different structure and serves new functions’ (D’Alisa et al. 2015, 4)” (Saave & Muaraca, 2021, pg. 746). Both degrowth and abolition theory challenge, critique, and envision.

2. Previous Research

In this section, the research on these topics is explored. Ideally, I would outline all the current literature comparing or integrating abolition and degrowth explicitly if there was any, but since there is not, I more broadly researched the intersections of abolition and environmental justice and environmental justice and racism or police to get as close as possible to their intersections. From this, two hybrid disciplines emerged: abolition ecology and green criminology, as well as other articles not under these disciplines exploring the intersections between police, welfare, and growth. These are discussed in order to better outline how scholars are making the connections between police and prisons and the environment. This will help to frame both the need for this particular study and to highlight existing rationales for combining these two disciplines broadly.

2.1 A Connection Between Degrowth and Abolition

There is no scholarly research that I could find that has been done documenting the theoretical or practical intersections of degrowth and abolition specifically, however on a political collective webportal, degrowth.info, there is one article where an activist places the two in conversation and discusses how abolition of police, prisons and military are a necessary precursor to a

sustainable world *and* to a racially-just degrowth society (Jung, 2020). This article served as inspiration for this thesis, putting so clearly into words the links between the two theories in practice. Working within a United States framework, the author outlines:

“In the United States, the police-, prison-, and military-industrial complexes serve as the engine that fuels racial capitalism. The expansion of these various but interconnected forms of oppression rests on the subjugation of incarcerated and colonized peoples and on the exploitation of land stolen from Indigenous nations. The abolition of such is necessary in achieving an equitable and sustainable world, in transitioning to a degrowth society.” (Jung, 2020)

Jung goes on to outline the evidence for this claim, highlighting the injustice of the U.S. historical and contemporary relationship to land and people. First, the land was stolen from its original stewards, the Native Americans, creating a relationship to land that involved colonization and ownership, necessitating private property and capital rights. Settlers utilized their belief in their cultural entitlement to the land through ‘Manifest Destiny’ to justify the genocide of indigenous people. This stolen land was then cared for and cultivated by stolen, enslaved African people who were seen as property of their traffickers, the white slave owners. Police originated from the white slave patrols that used state-sanctioned vigilante justice to “enforce the ‘property’ rights of slave owners” by hunting and punishing enslaved people who fled their captors. And as Jung points out, “this expansion of American imperialism and racial capitalism reveals a deeply intertwined relationship between the pillaging of Native American soil and the country’s use of slave labor to exert control over it” (Jung, 2020). This exploitative dyad, Jung argues, lays the foundation for an environmentally disconnected people and a state who sees no value in the land and environment beyond its extractable, capital accumulating

resources. This leads the U.S. to environmentally disastrous moves, including colonizing other lands to put more military bases, bailouts of corrupt industries that destroy union jobs and replace them with exploitative employers like Amazon, and complete disregard for climate change so long as it doesn't disrupt profits.

“Under the growth paradigm, what has been lost in GDP can be made up for in GDP. In other words, the drop in human well-being does not factor into the bigger picture of an economy that only cares about profit and production. This endless pursuit of profit undergirded by racial capitalism and the colonial project has catapulted us down the path of accelerating ecological disaster and deepening socio-economic inequity” (Jung, 2020).

In Jung's claim, police and prisons are the enforcers of this version of the social order. They enable a massive prison labor force that replicates slavery, they maintain violent control of racialized people who've been severed from their relationship to their land and communities, and they protect the elite's ability to exploit and build capital through private property rights and exploitative labor practices (again, see: Amazon). Therefore, by this estimation, a degrowth society could never coexist without abolition: “ultimately, the degrowth of the US is impossible unless we reckon with white supremacy's fetishization of private property and economic growth—it is impossible unless we strive towards a racially-just world.” Overall, Jung critiques the racialized, capitalist world order that dominates the U.S. economy and the police, prison and military system that undergirds its domination. It is argued, then, that abolition theory and degrowth theory need one another in order to realize their visions for the future.

2.2 Abolition Ecology

Geographers Nik Heynen and Megan Ybarra (2020) push forward the “analytic of abolition ecology” from a position that political ecology (the study of the intersections of

political and social factors with environment) should “systematically engage with the ways that white supremacy shapes human relationships with land through entangled processes of settler colonialism, empire and racial capitalism” (Heynen, Ybarra, 2020). They argue that abolition politics bring an important perspective of root social justice issues to the ways in which people relate to land and non-human animals. Together, “abolition ecology seeks to build intuitions and processes that are explicitly focused on the political ecological imperatives of access to fresh air, clean water, sufficient land, amelioration of toxic chemicals, and beyond” (Heynen, Ybarra, 2020). Abolition is uniquely poised to offer this enhancement to political ecology because of its radical fusion of past and future. Abolition politics have a powerful vision for the future that is rooted in an understanding of current and past inequitable relationships; especially those rooted in racism and colonialism. In relation to ecology, the authors draw upon abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore for analysis, quoting her analysis that:

“if abolitionists are, first and foremost, committed to the possibility of full and rich lives for everybody, then that would mean that all kinds of distinctions and categorisations that divide us—innocent/guilty; documented/not; Black, white, Brown; citizen/not-citizen—**would have to yield in favor of other things, like the right to water, the right to air, the right to the countryside, the right to the city, whatever these rights are**” (Heynen, Ybarra, 2020, as quoted in Lloyd 2012, emphasis mine).

This article is particularly illuminating in its imperative that ecology and abolition have much to give one another. While not explicitly addressing degrowth, this perspective shows that related disciplines to degrowth are exploring the ways in which an abolitionist politic is helpful in bringing a decolonial and anti-racist perspective to our understanding of environmental disciplines.

2.3 Green Criminology

Similarly, green criminology takes up an intersection not traditionally explored in academia: environmentalism and criminology. One such article “Embracing ‘Abolition Ecology:’ A Green Criminological Rejoinder” (Stephens-Griffin, 2022) seeks to make a case for why the field of green criminology is well poised to engage with the “radical possibilities” posed by abolition ecology. Underpinning this argument is the “acknowledgement of the connections between racist carceral systems and ecological harm” and the assertion that by embracing abolitionist principles more broadly, green criminology can move itself towards a more anti-racist lens (Stephens-Griffin, 2022). Additionally, the author sees a connection between the way that abolition and green criminology view power relationships within society. The author argues that green criminology has a unique perspective to add in the way that it expands the definition of crime to include “harms against animals and ecosystems...highlighting how laws function in the interests of the powerful, and against the interests of specific communities as well as non-humans and the environment” (Stephens-Griffin, 2022). This fundamental compatibility builds towards the argument that abolition is a valuable and necessary analytic to add to environmental justice disciplines. Similarly, the way in which the prison-industrial-complex (Davis, 2003) functions is not only to destroy and disrupt human life but also non-human animal life and nature. Stephens-Griffin (2002) even argues that the very same logics (capitalism, extractivism, and colonialism, namely) that allow us to dominate and subjugate non-human animals and natural environments are also the ones that allow us to condone carceral systems. There is also the question of imagination. It seems in all of the literature where abolition is discussed, that its capacity and impetus for imagination is of principal value to surrounding disciplines. Stephens-Griffin ends their article with this notion:

“As Coyle and Schept (2018) have previously argued in this journal, a slave-free society only existed in people’s imaginations, before the abolition of slavery in the USA, and a non-carceral, ecologically just society only exists in our imaginations today. It is therefore vital we have the courage to imagine more racially and ecologically just futures, articulating a vision of ‘what we want, not what we think we can get’ (Critical Resistance 2008: xii)” (2002).

Green criminology and abolition ecology are the closest intersections in the literature between abolition and degrowth. Importantly, they still highlight the fundamental compatibility of abolition with ecological disciplines, and vice-versa.

2.4 Growth, Welfare and Prisons

In the article “Lock them up! Lock them up? A critique of the prison mosaic” by Jan C. Zoellick (2018), the author critiques the prison system and its various entanglements with racism, neoliberal social policy, and class. They discuss abolitionist praxis without citing it as such, including restorative and transformative justice. They also point to degrowth as a possible ‘alternative’ solution. The crux of the article is to “sketch major points of critique towards incarceration and highlight its entanglement with growth-oriented, exploitative social structures” (Zoellick, 2018, p. 2). Interestingly, the article cites that

“Among countries of the global north a clear correlation between welfare spending, punitive spending for prison and law enforcement infrastructure, and a corresponding rate of incarceration is observed (Lappi-Seppälä, 2010). Countries with low spending for welfare programmes and education exhibit the largest incarceration rates (e.g., USA or UK), while countries with high spending for welfare programmes exhibit low rates of incarceration (e.g., Sweden or Iceland). Particularly the first approach of low welfare

spending results in a rift along class lines with disproportionate incarceration of poor people (Wacquant, 2001)” (Zoellick, 2018, p. 2).

The author evaluates how welfare spending and incarceration rates coincide, drawing examples of Foucauldian power and neoliberalism to explain this phenomenon. In the Foucauldian view of power, the author discusses how surveillance becomes pervasive and imminent in the everyday lives of people, but especially those in poverty (pg. 4). It is through this that the lack of welfare programs combined with the overwhelming surveillance of those in poverty (poverty that is likely exacerbated by lack of welfare) that police become a tool of social control instead of public safety. Prisons expand “...and become commodified to efficiently manage and administer poverty (Wacquant, 2009)” (Zoellick, 2018, p. 4). This is exacerbated, even in the ‘strong’ welfare states like Sweden due to the logics of neoliberalism that seep into public policy, namely “the construction of a post-Keynesian, ‘liberal-paternalistic’ state suited to institute desocialized wage labor and propagate the renewed ethic of work and “individual responsibility” that buttress it’ (Wacquant, 2009, p. 85, accentuations in original)” (Zoellick, 2018, p. 5). This critique highlights the failures of neoliberal logic and illustrates how when combined with waning welfare programs, poverty is exacerbated. The best tool the “left hand” of the state has to manage poverty then becomes a very strong “right hand,” i.e. police and prisons who are tasked with providing a “punitive response to social ills” (pg. 5) instead. Turning towards solutions or alternatives, the author cites transformative and restorative justice, two practices that find their roots in abolitionist praxis. Importantly they also quote Latouche (2015)’s “decolonization of the imaginary”, where “the imaginary depicts a belief structure that creates social reality. Incentives and prescriptions towards unlimited expansion together with the centralisation of spectacular consumption have colonised this belief structure resulting in uniform understandings of progress,

freedom, or development” (pg. 6). Lying beyond this colonization, it is argued that alternatives to incarceration and other bold ideas lie, and the idea of police and prisons as a response to social issues becomes illegitimate. One such example offered is the “concrete utopia,” “fundamental opposition to neoliberalism,” and “emancipatory project” of degrowth (pg. 7). According to Zoellick,

“Degrowth signifies a society with a smaller metabolism, but more importantly, a society with a metabolism which has a different structure and serves new functions. Degrowth does not call for doing less of the same. 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 energies, different relations, different gender roles, different allocations of time between paid and non-paid work, different relations with the non-human world (D’Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2015, p. 4)” (Zoellick, 2018, pgs.7-8).

And although the author critiques degrowth theory for its lack of concrete solutions, it is still discussed as an important opportunity for future movement. In this article the author clearly outlines a critique of the use of police and prisons as a response to poverty and cites waning welfare and neoliberalism as major causes of this shift. Importantly, in the discussion of possible alternatives both degrowth and abolition (even abstractly) are discussed under the prompt of the “decolonized imaginary.”

2.5 Degrowth in the U.S. Racial Context

“The World is Yours: “Degrowth”, Racial Inequality and Sustainability” authored by Brian Gilmore from Michigan State University (2013), details an important and interesting dilemma for degrowth to take hold in the U.S. context. He first begins by outlining the social

location of Black Americans. He identifies that their ancestral ties to Africa, history of enslavement and continued exploitation in (what is now known as) the U.S. and present-day collective affinity, firmly as Americans, but decidedly oppressed, make for a complicated relationship to being considered part of the ‘Global North,’ a critical delineation in degrowth theory’s conceptualization of the world and culpability (pg. 1293). The author argues that while Black Americans are absolutely for justice, that degrowth might be a hard sell given the socio-political history and effect of systemic racism:

“Considering all of these disparities, black Americans should find questions of sustainability and reexamination of economic growth issues as a potential opportunity to address many of these unequal outcomes in the profit driven society of the US. However, “degrowth” also presents a paradox, especially if inequality is not addressed. At a time when many black Americans are actually achieving upward mobility, economic success and freedom and flexibility in a free market world of globalization and opportunity [47], the charge now is to abandon economic growth in favor of “degrowth” (Gilmore, 2013, p. 1292).

This presents an important and worthy challenge for degrowth theory. The author argues that if it were to be accepted in the U.S. it would *need* to come alongside a solid plan to ameliorate the existing inequalities and systemic disadvantage plaguing the current systems that disproportionately impact Black Americans. Without such, he worries they would be left behind or worse off, an unacceptable reality. He posits that if through some means, perhaps restorative justice or reparations at the federal level (pgs. 1295-1296), notably both not cited as such but very much within abolitionist praxis, that degrowth could become feasible for Black Americans to accept. “The need for sustainable growth is important, but restorative justice is a prerequisite

[71]” (Gilmore, 2013, p. 1297) is an important highlight of this article. Succinctly put, the author posits: “In regards to “degrowth”, such a system asks: can the US and its citizens become a credible participant towards a sustainable future without first addressing this historical inequality?” (Gilmore, 2013, p. 1289). I find partial motivation for this thesis in this article. When motivating the need for degrowth and abolition theory to talk to one another in the literature, this is a primary concern. Especially in the case of degrowth, it is clear that it may not be accepted without a strong liberatory agenda accompanying it. Abolition and its many practices may be a valuable thought partner and puzzle piece to creating this future.

2.6 Policing, Prisons, and the Environment

Placing policing, prisons, and the environmental justice movement in conversation, Andrea Brock and Nathan Stephens-Griffin (2022) present their case for why police facilitate environmental injustice and why Environmental Justice (as a movement) “must challenge the assumed necessity of policing, overcome the mythology of the state as ‘arbiter of justice’, and work to create social conditions in which policing is unnecessary” (pg. 65). They first take up the critique of police as an agent of the state that enforces the state’s environmentally destructive policy and action. Within a British imperial context, the authors argue that the police are key in maintaining the state’s colonial and extractivist practices, ultimately only serving to protect the rich from their ‘ecocidal’ dealings including their hand in slavery, resource extraction from other nations, suppression of dissent to environmental “megaprojects” and other destructive policies (pg. 66-67). They then challenge Environmental Justice scholars and activists to recognize the inherent need for abolitionist visions for the future and collaborate accordingly (pg. 68). Taking a global look at the intersections of environmental justice and policing, how exacerbated they become under the carceral state, and in defense of a multi-issue liberatory agenda that not only

addresses environmental destruction but uproots the logics that allow it, the authors propose that “in making alliances with abolitionist struggles, and in explicitly working towards abolitionist goals, EJ scholars and activists alike can help to address the pernicious yet vital role that policing plays in upholding environmental and climate injustice globally, and all the harmful hierarchies therein” (p. 78). This is an important underpin for this thesis as well, suggesting that abolition has something to offer to environmental movements, of which degrowth is one. In many ways, the literature supports a hypothesis that the same fundamental critiques of the state might be present in abolition and degrowth theory, given that they could so easily complement one another, especially when it comes to practical solutions for the future.

In conclusion, previous research, although not explicitly linked in the same way as this present study, is beginning to build the justifications for an integration of abolition and environmental theories. Thus, I form the basis of my claim that abolition and degrowth belong in conversation together. Scholars are already writing about the intersections of abolition politics, social justice, and environmentally-focused disciplines, and ideally my thesis can add to this conversation by explicitly comparing the two.

3. Theory

3.1 Conceptualizing the Welfare State

Beyond the frameworks of abolition and degrowth, central to this thesis is the idea of the welfare state. Several scholars have sought to conceptualize and define the welfare state, most notably Esping-Andersson (1990) in his attempt to provide a typology of different governments and their corresponding welfare regimes based on their relationship to market forces. Broadly, the welfare state can be understood as a socio-political landscape of services, programs, and

policies that make up the government's approach to redistributing its revenue into meeting the social service needs of its constituents. This can include education, healthcare, retirement, emergency support, unemployment, and even migration services. Welfare theorists generally conceptualize the "welfare state" as either (or inclusive of) serving the poor; social services and social programs; or economic management (Garland, 2016). It is important when discussing the welfare state to be precise in which conceptualizations one is using, as every person has their own idea and politicized understanding of what it means. For the purposes of this thesis, which naturally has a heavy US and European focus, the welfare state will be conceptualized as anything coming from local, state, or federal government (in the European case EU-level policy will also count) that does any or all of those three things; serves the poor, is a social service or program, or a economic management program or policy (such as labor-market regulation). Due to the breadth covered in both abolition and degrowth theory, many solutions and critiques will span all of these domains.

3.2 Sociological Imagination and the Socioecological Model

First introduced by sociologist C. Wright Mills in his 1959 book "The Sociological Imagination," the theory is a broad encouragement of individuals to understand their positionalities as inherently connected to larger societal structures and historical contexts. The imaginative process requires the ability to first understand one's own story, identities, and struggles and further to be able to integrate those into knowledge of history and contemporary issues. Drawing on the socioecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner in 1977, humans are shaped by all of their environments including their immediate family system all the way up to the societal factors completely outside one's control. Many public health agencies have adopted this model in order

to understand complex issues like substance abuse and community violence. The theory offers a delineation of the spheres of influence in a person's life. The Center for Disease Control utilizes an adapted four level model that I will utilize for this analysis. The model highlights that there are levels of influence in a person's life: individual, relationship (often immediate family or household), community and society. This is also referred to in social work practice as macro (high-level, societal, governmental functions), mezzo (community level), and micro (concerning individual relationships). These levels interplay and influence one another to create the ultimate impact on a person's life (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).



Figure from the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/social-ecologicalmodel.html>

Using these two frameworks will aid in the analysis of the solutions proposed by each theory, guiding my understanding of how each conceptualizes the role of human beings in their micro, mezzo and macro systems and how an understanding of historical context shapes future-thinking ideologies and utopias. These theories are appropriate choices for a social work thesis because they tie in the foundational elements of the social work discipline; that people are shaped by their environments, that in addition to individualized care plans, a person's environment(s) must be analyzed and addressed, and that the way in which a person places (imagines) themselves within

the social order matters greatly to their treatment plan. Using these two theories will allow me to make sense of the ways in which both degrowth and abolitionist theorists use their theory to make sense of their place in the world and in turn, imagine and advocate for new realities. Imagination is a powerful tool in social change, and very worthy of analysis in the academic space, these theories help provide a backbone to understand imagination as it shows up within the systematic evaluations in abolition and degrowth theory.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Strategy

As a reminder, this research project is a qualitative, comparative, framework analysis seeking to identify how degrowth and abolition theory 1) critique the welfare state and 2) envision possible solutions. In order to achieve this, I completed a systematic review of sampled literature from both disciplines using framework analysis as a guide. Once the empirical data was gathered, I analyzed the results using a comparative approach, seeking to highlight their points of convergence and divergence and synthesize all connections through the theoretical lenses outlined earlier in this paper. The results are discussed in depth and conclude with a discussion about the implications of the findings. In the following sections I will justify the methodological choices and outline the procedures followed in more detail.

4.2 Methodological Choice: Literature Review

While it is possible and perhaps one of the limitations of this project that this research question could be approached utilizing a plethora of methods, including expert interviews, statistical analysis or case studies, I was motivated by the understanding that this project had the potential to produce new knowledge on connections that had not yet been explored formally

between these two disciplines. In this way, there is a foundational objective and therefore a systematic review of literature can be very valuable to future research. I felt there wouldn't be as much value to future projects with a statistical analysis (say a content analysis of similar themes or discourses) as the richness of the data could be lost, and doing a case study alone would be difficult to situate given there is little current overlapping literature. Expert interviews would have been tremendously valuable, however, were not possible given my lack of personal connections and the timeframe for a thesis project. However, future research would be greatly enriched by their perspectives. A systematic literature review is not only feasible given the resources and time allocated for the thesis, but it is an instrumental tool in motivating the need for future research, in this case, a primary objective of the project.

4.3 Framework Analysis

Chosen as the primary methodology for this project, Framework Analysis was developed by researchers Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer in order to analyze qualitative data for applied policy research (Goldsmith, 2021). It is defined as “an inherently comparative form of thematic analysis which employs an organized structure of inductively- and deductively derived themes (i.e., a framework) to conduct cross-sectional analysis using a combination of data description and abstraction” (Goldsmith, 2021, pg. 2061). Further, “the overall objective of framework analysis is to identify, describe, and interpret key patterns within and across cases of and themes within the phenomenon of interest through being both grounded in and interpreting from the data” (Goldsmith, pg. 2061). This makes it an appropriate choice for this project as it will allow for themes among the two research questions to be drawn from the data without the need for prescriptive theory and for the results to be easily and comprehensibly compared. As Goldsmith points out in her article “Using Framework Analysis in Applied Qualitative Research” (2021),

this method can be used for more inductive, theory building purposes, especially for policy scholars close to the issue (pg. 2062). The methodology finds its strength in its clear directions, for a novice researcher like myself this allows for ease of use, transparency of process, and validity. There is a challenge, as Goldsmith also concurs (pg. 2073), in creating a framework that will fit the use of secondary data. They note it can be harder to find a research question to fit your data set. To manage this limitation, I used purposive sampling to ensure the articles sampled included at least some information related to my research questions.

Framework Analysis utilizes the following structure: “(1) data familiarization; (2) identifying a thematic framework; (3) indexing (coding) all study data against the framework; (4) charting to summarize the indexed data; and (5) mapping and interpretation of patterns found within the charts” (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, as outlined in Goldsmith, 2021, pg. 2062). Following this structure, my process was as follows. First, I familiarized myself with the data by reading each text in-depth, keeping notes on key themes I was noticing throughout the texts. This included a “first round” of coding (referred to as ‘indexing’ in this method), sorting the themes I was seeing into critique, solution, or “other” (used to keep track of worthwhile notes that could fit elsewhere in the paper or didn’t fit into the framework but were still of interest or noteworthy). Then, I moved on to the framework identification phase, identifying the most important and pertinent themes and starting to identify the relationships they have to one another. This commenced a second round of coding that wasn’t line-by-line coding, but rather sorted the critique and solution codes into sub-themes and annotated for conceptual similarities. In this way it blended with the third step of coding all the data against the framework. The “units of analysis” are literature pertaining to degrowth, literature pertaining to abolition, and within these two, units of text engaging in critique and/or solutions. This was an iterative process, I combed

the data several times adding and refining the codes and their assignments, creating concept maps to help me draw connections between concepts, running queries to understand frequencies and patterns. The next step is to chart the data to allow for appropriate comparison. Thankfully, using the NVivo software allowed me to easily create charts comparing the codes. Utilizing the crosstab and coding matrices functions, I was able to create charts that allowed me to compare code density and explore the codes contained within for ease of comparison.

4.4 Sampling Procedure

Utilizing the logic presented in Prior's "Using Documents and Records in Social Research" (2011), it is helpful first to set up a sampling frame to identify what texts I am even considering to look at. Prior writes that "an essential first step to random case selection, then, must involve identification of all of the members of a given population. This, in turn, should lead to the construction of a sampling frame (de Vaus, 1996)" (Prior, 2011, pg. 8). Creating sampling frames for entire bodies of theory proved to be impossible so the following sampling procedure was employed.

For the abolition literature, I used purposive sampling. The reason for this is that abolition is not a highly academic theory, meaning there is hardly any journal or formally peer-reviewed literature on contemporary abolition. This is not for lack of rigor or discipline, instead it is indicative of the radical nature of the theory and perhaps a strength, that it has not yet been completely absorbed into academia. Instead, there is a rich and thorough grassroots and scholar-activist literature base available online that often prioritized open-access above all. Having been familiar with and somewhat in touch with the abolitionist movement in Seattle, Washington, I was aware that a prominent lawyer, activist, and professor at the Seattle University law school (my alma mater), Nikkita Oliver, had created a course on "Abolition 101" for the law

school and had published the syllabus on their website alongside a similar, but slightly more accessible, “community” syllabus. Linked in this syllabus were other prominent and well-respected study guides that contained compilations of readings, videos, and media that were appropriate for those trying to learn about abolition. In order to create my population of articles to sample from, I compiled all the books and articles (they could be newspaper, blog, or other digital media) from these four syllabi into a spreadsheet. The inclusion criteria was that it must be a book, academic article, or grassroots literature article. Zines (miniature magazines), videos, comics, podcast transcripts, poems and creative expression literature were excluded to try and best mimic the rigor of a ‘traditional’ study. My goal with the spreadsheet was to identify which books, articles, and authors showed up the most frequently on the study guides. This, I felt, would point me to the seminal and most useful, respected, or valuable literature on the topic of abolition. I compiled all the articles that showed up at least twice into a condensed spreadsheet which allowed me to compare and count the frequency of presence of articles and authors. From the 175 unduplicated units in the population, 11 had a frequency of being on at least two of the four (if not more) syllabi and thus were selected for sampling.

Unit	Rationale
Spade, Bassichis, and Lee, "Building a Queer and Trans Abolitionist Movement with All We've Got"	this book in 3 out of 4 guides and author cited in 3 out of 4 guides
Beth Richie (2012) Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence and America's Prison Nation. New York and London: New York University Press.	book and author cited in 3 out of 4 guides
Angela Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete? Chapter 2: "Slavery, Civil Rights, and Abolitionist Perspectives Toward Prison"	book and author cited in 4 out of 4 guides
"Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement" Edited by Ejeris Dixon and LEah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha	book cited in 3 out of 4 guides
Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (2008) Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex [3 pages]	anthology cited 2 out 4 guides, statement cited 2 out of 4 guides, something cited in 3 out of 4 guides
Mariame Kaba, "Yes, We Literally Mean Abolish the Police"	both articles cited in 2 out of 4 guides, author cited in 4 out of 4 guides
Berger, Dan and Mariame Kaba and David Stein (2017). 'What Abolitionists do,' Jacobinmag.com [5 pages]	cited in 2 out of 4 guides
Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California	cited in 2 out of 4 guides, author cited in 3 out of 4 guides
Victoria Law, "Against Carceral Feminism"	this article cited in 2 out of 4, author cited in 3 out of 4
"Invisible No more: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color" by Andrea J. Ritchie (The Invisible No More Study Guide)	book cited in 2 out of 4, author cited in 3 out of 4
Joshua Briond (2017) Navigating justice for sexual abuse survivors, when you're a prison abolitionist and a survivor. Afropunk.com.	only cited in 2 out of 4 guides

The abolition literature population was garnered from texts available on Lubsearch, Lund University's library system. The keywords used to search for relevant literature were "degrowth + welfare," which yielded 115 results. These results were imported into the reference management software, Zotero, where duplicates and articles in languages other than English were deleted. This left 61 possible articles to be sampled. To match the sample size of abolition, I sought to create a simple random sample of 12, roughly 20% of the population. I utilized excel, where each article was assigned a random numerical value. From this, the 12 articles in the degrowth sample were collected.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

My main ethical consideration is that of transparency and positionality. I hold many identities that inform my experience of the texts I will be analyzing. I consider myself an avid abolitionist and know that brings a certain positive bias to the way I present the framework. I am aware that I am analyzing a framework created mostly by Black, Indigenous and people of color in the United States whereas I am a white U.S. American. I hope to be transparent in my rationales so that it can be adequately critiqued based on any limitations my positionality presents. Additionally, as a citizen of the Global North discussing degrowth, I understand that being able to have theoretical debates about climate change is an extreme privilege when many are faced with its impacts so severely their survival is foremost. Ideally, their voices would be lifted up the most.

5. Results

5.1 Abolitionist Critique

The abolitionist critique is densely concentrated into the themes of ideology and the role of the state, with 51 and 39 coding references respectively. The second highest number of coding references is a Welfare State Programs with 26, Child Welfare is a subcode of welfare programs and has 17 references. The details of coding references are found below. Public and social policies have 10, capitalism and labor combined have 15. Welfare Reform has 8 references and prisons 17. In order to more helpfully discuss the results I have grouped some of the themes and examined them together.

Codes	Abolition	Total
<input type="radio"/> Capitalism	8	8
<input type="radio"/> Labor	7	7
<input type="radio"/> Ideology	51	51
<input type="radio"/> Prisons	17	17
<input type="radio"/> Public or Social Policies	10	10
<input type="radio"/> The State	39	39
<input type="radio"/> Welfare Reform	8	8
<input type="radio"/> Welfare State-Programs	26	26
<input type="radio"/> Child Welfare System	12	12
Total	178	178

The Role of the State

First, let's explore the most referenced code, the state. In her book *“Golden gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California”* (2007), abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes how the Western U.S. state of California saw an exponential increase in prisons in the 1980s and 90s, and outlines how the state's role as an arbiter of “economic surplus” enacted and enabled this expansion. She anchors her claim in a historical review of the U.S. welfare state, beginning in the early 20th century, where she introduces the idea that the U.S. has a “welfare-warfare” framework (pg. 25) where wealth accumulated from military activity plays a significant role in the development of welfare infrastructure:

“The wealth produced from warfare spending did two things: it helped knit the nation's vast marginal hinterland (the South and the West) into the national economy by moving vast quantities of publicly funded construction and development projects, and people to do the work, to those regions (with California gaining the most) (Schulman 1994). The wealth also underwrote the motley welfare agencies that took form during the Great

Depression but did not become truly operational until the end of World War II (Gregory Hooks 1991)” (pg. 25).

This connection is also described as “military Keynesianism”...to denote the centrality of war-making to socioeconomic security” (pg. 25). California amassed huge industries dedicated to supporting warmaking efforts including aerospace programs, electronics and weapons manufacturing (pg. 36), that ultimately tied the state's economy to the production of war-enabling material. And it proved to be quite lucrative,

“California functioned as “the principal engine of U.S. economic growth” (Walker 1995: 43) during the postwar “golden age” (Glyn et al. 1990) and used resources from defense-dependent prosperity to provide state residents with broadening protections from calamity and opportunities for advancement.” (pg. 52).

After a series of recessions that induced significant unemployment, military spending cuts, and changing political priority in the 70s, there was a drastic reduction in these welfare state protections, with voters also playing into narratives about the need for a reduction in state control. The weaning welfare state left more capital surplus and a cultural narrative of a need for “law and order” (pg. 40) thus leaving a fertile ground for prison expansion. Gilmore’s critique centers around this manipulation and strategic disinvestment and abandonment of workers:

“Indeed, the expansion of community-based institutions can be a direct result of the state’s reduction of social services—such as school programs. The state can also step up policing, under its mandate to maintain internal order, due to actual or imagined antisocial behaviors among idled workers or disenchanting youth. New power blocs can form around the remaining legitimate areas in which the state’s power can be exercised,

such as law and order, local development, or moral directives for civilian behavior.

Indeed, the weakening of old social, political, and cultural forms opens the way to a wide variety of new alliances, institutions, movements, all of which are coaxed, but not directed, by already existing practices” (pgs. 55-56).

The state, from this view, is an instrument of oppression, not protection or security. The state is neglectful in its duty to its citizens, using its power for control and coercion rather than well-being. The state has ultimate loyalty to capital accumulation. Other authors have similar critiques of the state, including highlighting the state's role in co-opting and disempowering the movements of its most vulnerable citizens, including women. Prominent abolitionist organization, Incite! (2011), highlights:

“The reliance on state funding to support anti-violence programs has increased the professionalization of the anti-violence movement and alienated it from its community-organizing, social justice roots. Such reliance has isolated the anti-violence movement from other social justice movements that seek to eradicate state violence, such that it acts in conflict rather than in collaboration with these movements.”

Bassichis, et al. (2011) echoes this view in his critique, saying that the non-profit sector has “professionalized” and co-opted radical ideas and reform, “prioritizing state- and foundation-sanctioned legal reforms and social services over mass organizing and direct action” (Bassichis, et al., 2011, pg. 23) thus compromising the community’s ability to self-sustain. This non-profit co-optation also siphons talented activists and community leaders into the non-profit world and away from “activism in the trenches” (pg. 26), causing a fragmented communal movement.

From the abolitionist view, it is in doing this that the state interferes with the community's natural ability to organize itself against violence:

“The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken power away from women's ability to organize collectively to stop violence and has invested this power within the state. The result is that women who seek redress in the criminal justice system feel disempowered and alienated. It has also promoted an individualistic approach toward ending violence such that the only way people think they can intervene in stopping violence is to call the police. This reliance has shifted our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence” (Incite!, 2011).

Concentrating the power to provide safety in an over-reliance on the criminal-legal system, the state overexerts its power *over* its constituents. It hoards power and resources into violent institutions like policing and prisons, instead of redistributing both its power and its resources into community-level solutions. Bassichis, et al. (2011) also critiques how the U.S. government and its “ally nations and institutions in the Global North” exerts this same power on the world stage, creating “international economic policies and trade agreements that reduced safety nets, worker rights, and environmental protections, particularly for nations in the Global South” (pg. 20). In particular, Bassichis, et al. criticizes how tactics like “hate crimes legislation is tacked on to multi-billion dollar "defense" bills to support US military domination in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere” (pg.16), implicating its most marginalized in its destructive activities abroad. This global meddling aids in the welfare-warfare model that Wilson Gilmore noted above. Destabilized countries are more likely to need U.S./Global North aid and therefore be indebted to follow U.S./Global North's agendas, even if they violate their own

self-preservation. The same way the state engages in the narrative of “first we will neglect you then convince you it is your fault” domestically, it does so pervasively abroad as well.

Broadly, abolitionists critique the state's use of police as the means to maintaining their monopoly on violence and control. They cite instances where women, in particular, are harmed by the police through policies that criminalize their vulnerability: “...under mandatory arrest laws, there have been numerous incidents where police officers called to domestic incidents have arrested the woman who is being battered. Many undocumented women have reported cases of sexual and domestic violence, only to find themselves deported” (Incite!, 2011). Or, they note several stories of times when police have acted violently towards pregnant and parenting women, enough to claim that “law enforcement often subjects pregnant women, particularly women of color, to punishments that contradict the state’s expressed intent to protect women and children, reflecting the actual underlying devaluation of both their motherhood and children” (Ritchie, 2017, p. 397). These punishments are underwritten by what abolitionists consider to be a far too great imposition of state power. Returning to Ruth Wilson Gilmore who writes: “Criminal justice is, literally, state power. It is the police, guns, prison, the electric chair. Power corrupts; and power also has an itch to suppress” (2007, pg.174). The abolitionist critique maintains that the state does this in order to uphold its oppressive ideologies including racism and sexism. These critiques will be detailed in the next section.

Ideology

“It is as if prison were an inevitable fact of life, like birth and death” – Angela Davis

The pervasive ideologies critiqued by abolitionists are moralism, racism, sexism, and neoliberalism. Each of these is interrelated, too, and combine to form what abolitionists believe

are the ideological underpinnings for a society so intensely dominated by carceral logics. These ideologies are being highlighted because they help illustrate the issues that abolitionists identify within the welfare state; they believe that the welfare state is both underwritten by these ideologies and an active perpetrator of them through programmatic requirements. The connection between police, the welfare state, and the state apparatus are closely knit in the abolitionist view, as outlined above and further proven here.

Prisons are useless without people to fill them with and police are unnecessary without crimes to penalize. The abolitionist view is that crime is socially-constructed rather than a natural, indelible feature of human relations. What a society deems as worthy of punishment and how society views appropriate recourse for mistakes and violence is indicative of its norms and values. How does prison become a seemingly natural feature of society, then? In seminal abolitionist work “Are Prisons Obsolete?” (2003) by activist, scholar and professor Dr. Angela Davis, she outlines how racism, classism and sexism intertwine to create an ethos of “the criminals” or the “evildoers” (pg. 16). This classic othering mentality allows for prison to be a catch-all for the hard-to-face realities of an unjust and racist society. Rationalizing prisons begets a sort of cognitive dissonance where, as Davis writes:

“We take prisons for granted but are often afraid to face the realities they produce. After all, no one wants to go to prison. Because it would be too agonizing to cope with the possibility that anyone, including ourselves, could become a prisoner, we tend to think of the prison as disconnected from our own lives” (pg. 15).

Abolitionists argue that this disconnection is an intentional byproduct of a deeply racist society in which these criminals and evildoers are “...in the collective imagination, fantasized as people of color” (Davis, 2003, pg. 16). Davis describes the result:

“The prison therefore functions ideologically as an abstract site into which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers.

This is the ideological work that the prison performs—it relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and, increasingly, global capitalism” (pg. 16, emphasis mine).

Who ends up in prison is deeply subjective, adding to the collective terror. In the United States history, racism is not, as Davis puts, “an unfortunate aberration of the past,” rather, it is an ideology that “continues to profoundly influence contemporary structures, attitudes and behaviors” (pg. 24). In the aftermath of slavery, Davis documents how white Americans utilized racist ideology to maintain their political and economic power. One of the greatest tools at their disposal was the criminal-legal system:

“Particularly in the United States, race has always played a central role in constructing presumptions of criminality. After the abolition of slavery, former slave states passed new legislation revising the Slave Codes in order to regulate the behavior of free blacks in ways similar to those that had existed during slavery. The new Black Codes proscribed a range of actions—such as vagrancy, absence from work, breach of job contracts, the possession of firearms, and insulting gestures or acts—that were criminalized only when the person charged was black” (Davis, pg. 28).

This helps point to an important abolitionist critique; that criminality and punishment is not actually about creating safety, instead, it’s about state control. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) defines : “...in the simple terms of the secular state, crime means a violation of the law. Laws change, depending on what, in a social order, counts as stability, and who, in a social order, needs

to be controlled” (pg. 12). A particularly invasive form of control is that of state-sanctioned sexism. A major abolitionist critique includes the insidious nature of sexism, especially towards Black women and mothers, at the hands of the political and social discourse around fitness to parent, deservingness of social welfare, and right to safety from male abusers (Richie, 2012, Ritchie, 2017). In *Invisible No More* (Ritchie, 2017), one of the most pervasive examples of this sexism is depicted in a description of an unfortunately common American cultural narrative:

“In the 1980s the image of the “welfare queen” and “welfare mother” was added to the perceptions of Black women rooted in slavery, joining in a toxic combination in which Black motherhood and Black children represent a deviant and fraudulent burden on the state that must be punished through heightened surveillance, sterilization, regulation, and punishment by public officials. The Black “welfare mother” is posited to give birth solely to increase the size of her check, only to neglect and abuse her children while spending money on extravagances for herself, all the while engaging in criminalized acts such as welfare fraud.” (p. 381)

This carefully crafted nexus between the welfare state, public opinion, and state enforcement particularly disadvantages Black women. On top of being an overtly racist, sexist ideology, it also disenfranchises Black children and the Black community as a whole because according to the abolitionist critique it condones and even encourages a stronger state presence in their lives. This results in increased child-welfare cases, police intervention, and loss of liberty. In addition to racism and sexism (or rather right alongside them) underwriting the justification for this treatment, moralism finds its way into the normative ideology. Moralism and criminality go hand in hand; in the U.S. context, as is being examined here, abolitionists argue that when someone behaves outside of what is expected of them in the given socio-political landscape they exist in,

the criminal justice system is the primary way of “correcting” the person. Arrested Justice (Richie, 2012) outlines this impact on marginalized communities:

“A closer, more critical examination of social policy that was advanced in the 1960s and expanded in the 1970s reveals subtle punitive, moralistic assumptions that resulted in attempts to control communities through programs based on narrow definitions of family, work, gender roles, and childhood, particularly for Black women in low-income communities. Indeed, while the state has always been a protector of some rights, it has also been an agent of control of people who are more socially marginalized—including pregnant women, public housing residents, young queer women, and others who threaten hegemonic norms. Even during political eras when more liberal ideology prevailed, social programs that looked like they were designed to increase social equality and expand opportunity subtly authorized the state use of its authority to control marginalized groups” (pgs. 125-126).

In a similar vein, Bassichis, et al. (2011) outline in their essay on Queer and Trans Abolition that queer and trans people have also been harmed deeply by the state and welfare state’s hegemonic mandates. Taking a macro perspective, they critique the particularly heinous scapegoating of working class people criminalized for surviving oppressive systems beyond their control (pg. 21). Queer and Trans people, they assert, are in solidarity with the abolitionist fight, as it is theirs too. Queer and Trans people are targeted by the state legal and immigration systems, left out of important legal protections and face high levels of policing (pgs. 17-18), often due to their existence outside of the same moralistic ideologies mentioned above.

This level of social prescription and control is particularly dangerous and insidious when coupled with neoliberalism, according to abolitionist critique. Neoliberalism resulted in a strategic and

deliberate “divestment” from social welfare services previously used to “provide a minimum standard of income, housing, health and education” (Richie, 2012, pg. 123). Abolitionists see neoliberalism as an intentional abandonment of the state’s commitment to protect the “basic human rights” of its citizens (Richie, 2012, pg. 124). Coupled with moralistic conservative behavioral critique and the individualization of systemic social issues (Richie, 2012, pg. 126), there becomes a particularly dangerous mixture for social welfare:

“The principal architects of America’s prison nation—conservative policymakers, religious leaders, and corporate decision-makers—were joined by more neoliberal supporters of a more limited governmental role in improving conditions in communities. There was a decided sense that the state had “overstepped its role” in providing resources and that individuals had to take responsibility for their social conditions, regardless of the circumstances that led to them. The erosion of entitlement programs, long-term benefits, exemptions, and other policy revisions are evidence that the sense of a collective responsibility was being replaced by stringent limitations on what the government would provide. Importantly, the shift was not only in terms of reallocating material resources and opportunities in such a way that it appeared that the state was abandoning a commitment to social advancement and equality. There was growing evidence that the state was also rejecting its commitment to social equality by using its ideological power to reassert hegemonic values about gender through social welfare reforms. Time limits on eligibility for welfare benefits, promotion of marriage as mandatory programming, stringent work requirements, and the like are evidence of this” (pgs. 125-6).

Here we can see clearly how abolitionists outline their critical theory. Grounded in both a historical understanding, sociological study, and political theory analysis, abolitionists not only

critique the institutions of policing and prisons but the very ideologies that underpin them. In doing so, they also highlight glaring issues with the U.S. welfare state as it is so deeply intertwined. The welfare state is a byproduct of the harmful ideologies present in most systems in the U.S. but, as I will outline ahead, abolitionists offer more targeted critiques of the welfare state programs as well, in particular the welfare reforms of the late 1990s.

Welfare Programs, Public Policy, Child Welfare and Welfare Reform

The harmful ideologies critiqued by abolition literature are acutely exemplified in what is known colloquially as welfare reform and formally as the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) administered by the democratic Clinton administration. One third of the abolition sources mention this act in their critique, making it important to highlight. The articles heavily critique the act's "gutting" of social safety nets and its disproportionate effect on women. In the article "Against Carceral Feminism" (2014) author Victoria Law reveals that "The [PRWORA] set a five-year limit on welfare, required recipients to work after two years, regardless of other circumstances, and instated a lifetime ban on welfare for those convicted of drug felonies or who had violated probation or parole." As a supreme example of neoliberal social policy and moralism, the act effectively cut the amount of people receiving a semblance of an "economic safety net" by 53 percent (Law, 2014) and according to Bassichis, et al., (2011) was shown to particularly harm women and children. The rationales for this act are particularly worthy of critique, as they were based on notions of demonizing the poor as lazy freeloaders while working people subsidized their recreation. Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) adds the racialized dynamic highlighting: "the safety net came under attack at two levels: technically, it was condemned as a device that distorted markets by providing an employment disincentive for low-wage workers, who, in the aggregate, keep wages—and therefore

prices—under control. Colloquially, the safety net was characterized as a hammock in which the undeserving poor (like Ronald Reagan’s much-publicized welfare queen) lounged while industrious Anglos labored or looked for work” (pg. 45). Not only did these policies lay their foundations on the belief that poverty is a personal failure simply fixed by wage labor, but also the belief that the state no longer had any responsibility to provide protection from the inevitable ails of capitalism, instead, it was one’s personal responsibility to make needing welfare rare and brief (Bassichis et al., 2011, pg. 21). Additionally, it heavily penalized drug use, automatically banning for life anyone convicted of a drug-related crime (Bassichis et al., 2011, pg. 22). This is especially disastrous given the difficulty entering the labor market with a criminal record in the U.S. As noted in “Against Carceral Feminism” (Law, 2014) and “Arrested Justice: black women, violence, and America’s prison nation” (Richie, 2012), all of these limitations greatly affect women survivors of abuse. The lack of social safety net and highly restrictive access make it extremely difficult for survivors to economically escape abusers. From personal experience in the field I also know that in order for women to receive benefits they must reveal who the father of the child is so that the state can go after him for retribution, essentially enabling them to garnish his wages or withhold his tax returns as “repayment” for the welfare given to the mother and child. This poses a huge problem for survivors as putting their abuser into state control this way can lead to potential aggravation and impact safety.

Another critique of the welfare state apparent in the literature is that accepting welfare then entitles the state to rule over, surveil, and prescribe parenting techniques. In “Arrested Justice: *black women, violence, and America’s prison nation*” (Richie, 2012), the author details how,

“the child protective system has a long and well-documented history of targeting families with children in which parents have limited resources. In recent years, researchers have paid considerable attention to women who experience male violence at the hands of the Child Protective Service system. The authors of “Understanding Families with Multiple Barriers to Self Sufficiency” noted that state employees viewed long-term welfare recipients as having few marketable job skills and thus reduced the level of service to this population. These policy changes are directed with noteworthy vigor toward women who have a complicated relationship with the law, women who are involved in non-normative sexual relationships, and young women (the overwhelming majority of whom are Black)” (p. 74-75).

Now, to put this in context, if we accept the premise that capitalism creates wealth inequality and therefore poverty and poor people, and if the state nonetheless relinquishes its responsibility to provide any safety net for the inevitable experience of poverty for many people living under a capitalist system and yet simultaneously creates a child-welfare system that severely surveils and penalizes the effects of poverty on parenting - it is curious how one is meant to survive the system. Simply put, “in the majority of child-welfare cases, Roberts argues, what is labeled as neglect is really defined by poverty” (Ritchie, 2017, p. 400) yet at the same time “when Black mothers and mothers of color turn to public institutions for support for themselves and their families, their parenting is subject to additional scrutiny by agency staff who are likely to report perceived deviations from white middle-class parenting standards to child-welfare authorities or police” (Ritchie, 2017, p. 400). Police, it is argued, are used as a tool in this oppression, charged with making arrests for children in “dangerous situations” rather than helping parents mitigate the issues with resources, for example: “...a 39-year-old Mexican immigrant, came home from

grocery shopping to discover the police had taken her boys, ages ten and four, because she left them alone for an hour and half. No child-care options were explored for her and [her] children” (Ritchie, 2017, p. 405). The overarching critique here is that parents of color and parents in poverty are disproportionately subject to state control through moralistic judgements and a lack of compassion and connection to resources. Instead, the police are used as an accomplice to the child-welfare system to remove children from their families of origin and punish the family, all while ignoring the socio-economic contexts that create the issues deemed as neglect or harm in the first place.

The main critique found in the abolitionist literature regarding welfare programs was the willful lack of them, as seven of the twelve sources mention some form of divestment and cuts to social services. Richie (2012) discusses how intentional the U.S. divestment is:

“The divestment process is a strategic one. Its intent is to eliminate services that were designed to provide a minimum standard of income, housing, health, and education. I am using the notion of divestment here to represent the aggregate decisions to advance a national neoliberal policy agenda that reduces budgets for social and health services and terminates community development programs. The term “divestment” implies some political intentionality—active decisions to implement a comprehensive change in society’s orientation toward its most marginalized citizens” (p. 123).

Abolitionists particularly trace this divestment to increased policing and incarceration, and critique how this then allows the prison system to become a warehouse for people they deem victimized by a neglectful social system. According to Incite! (2011), “when public funding is channeled into policing and prisons, budget cuts for social programs, including women’s shelters, welfare and public housing are the inevitable side effects” and leave women survivors

particularly vulnerable. Wilson Gilmore (2007) uses the term “service-starved streets” (pg. 16) to describe the social environment that people experiencing mental illness are forced onto upon release from prison, where their symptoms were most certainly exacerbated. In Bassichi et al.’s (2011) critique of the mainstream LGBTQ+ movement towards marriage equality, they even mention what he perceives as the more pressing issue: how the number of queer and trans people “without steady jobs, housing, or healthcare continues to rise” while “health and social services continue to be cut” (pg. 16). Davis (2003) traces the rise in the women’s prison population to cuts in welfare services and economic choices:

“the economic and political shifts of the 1980s—the globalization of economic markets, the deindustrialization of the U.S. economy, the dismantling of such social service programs as Aid to Families of Dependent Children, and, of course, the prison construction boom—produced a significant acceleration in the rate of women's imprisonment both inside and outside the United States” (pg. 65).

Particularly cutting and succinct, she also writes “In the context of an economy that was driven by an unprecedented pursuit of profit, no matter what the human cost, and the concomitant dismantling of the welfare state, poor people's abilities to survive became increasingly constrained by the looming presence of the prison” (Davis, 2003, pg. 91). This illustrates so clearly the abolitionist critique: when the U.S. simultaneously cuts welfare services and increases police and prison budgets, “mass incarceration has been the most thoroughly implemented government social program of our time” (quoted from Elliott Currie in Davis, 2003, pg. 11). This, abolitionists demand, is unacceptable.

Capitalism and Labor

In addition to the critiques of the conditions that capitalism creates that have been discussed already, the drive for the lack of social welfare and instead prioritization of police and prisons is also linked in the literature as a result of capitalism. According to the literature, prisons do three things: disappear social problems, house a surplus of unneeded workers and transform them into a cheap exploitable workforce, and generate profit for corporations involved in the construction and maintenance of prisons. This for-profit prison dilemma is coined as the “prison-industrial complex” and detailed by Davis (2003) as such:

“Each new prison spawned yet another new prison. And as the U.S. prison system expanded, so did corporate involvement in construction, provision of goods and services, and use of prison labor. Because of the extent to which prison building and operation began to attract vast amounts of capital—from the construction industry to food and health care provision—in a way that recalled the emergence of the military industrial complex, we began to refer to a “prison industrial complex” (pg. 12)

Moreover, Davis makes astute observations as to the connection between the rise of commodified wage labor and the rise of prisons as linked along the spatial dimensions of capitalism. The Age of Reason, she argues, is a historical time period that provided the logic for the implementation of arbitrary timed prison sentences and this, she notes, coincides with “the historical period when the value of labor began to be calculated in terms of time and therefore compensated in another quantifiable way, by money. The computability of state punishment in terms of time—days, months, years—resonates with the role of labor-time as the basis for computing the value of capitalist commodities” (pg. 44). She notes that “Marxist theorists of punishment have noted that precisely the historical period during which the commodity form

arose is the era during which penitentiary sentences emerged as the primary form of punishment” (pg. 44). The commodification of time through the exchange of labor for money, the crux of the capitalist mechanism, thus provides a logic for prison sentencing, further enmeshing the capitalist system into human life. Ironically, imprisonment does not punish the economy by removing a wage laborer, instead it diverts a previously more expensive wage laborer into a situation where their labor becomes cheaper and more exploitable. This makes prisons an attractive business opportunity for corporations. As Wilson Gilmore (2007) discusses in her critique of the rise of prisons in California, “the progressive nature of capitalism requires the essential commodity—working people’s labor power—in varying quantities and qualities over space, sector, and time” (pg. 71), and prisons provide just that.

5.2 Abolitionist Solutions

The most coded abolitionist solutions are ideological shifts (30), systemic changes (29), community-based solutions (20), and relationships (10). Due to the small number of references, economic, gender equality, personal improvement, and storytelling were not evaluated.

Codes	Abolition	Total
<input type="radio"/> Community-Based Solutions	20	20
<input type="radio"/> Democratic Processes	0	0
<input type="radio"/> Doughnut Space	0	0
<input type="radio"/> Economic	2	2
<input type="radio"/> Gender Equality	3	3
<input type="radio"/> Ideological	30	30
<input type="radio"/> Personal Improvement	2	2
<input type="radio"/> Relationships	10	10
<input type="radio"/> Storytelling	3	3
<input type="radio"/> Sustainable Welfare	0	0
<input type="radio"/> Systemic	29	29
Total	99	99

Ideological Shifts

First we turn to the most “macro” of the solutions, the ways in which we think, reason, and create meaning as a society. Abolitionists are keen to make sweeping shifts in the way we view ourselves, our relationships, crime, punishment, and violence. Maybe most foundationally is the idea that there is not going to be a “one size fits all” solution, rather there will be multiple and evolving solutions that ideally coexist to best meet the needs of each community: “...rather than try to imagine one single alternative to the existing system of incarceration, we might envision an array of alternatives that will require radical transformations of many aspects of our society” (Davis, 2003, pg. 108). Some of the ideological shifts include a more anarchistic structure, “I believe we can build community safety systems that will one day operate independently from the police and government” (Dixon, et al., 2020, Chapter 1, p. 21) and a call for a leftist strategy, “there is an urgent need for robust debate on the Left about how to dismantle the carceral state and what will replace it (Berger, et al., 2017). Additionally, some call for a reevaluation of what is considered criminal, drawing on a compassionate and systems-informed approach to behavior deemed harmful. For example, in an article about justice for sexual assault survivors the author recommends that “We must analyze the limitations of enhancing criminalization so that we can begin working toward focusing on how to prevent violence and how to heal from it; to work on the issues at their root instead of simply bandaging them” (Briond, 2017) and Angela Davis (2003), proposes decriminalization towards the end of decarceration, “A further challenge for abolitionists is to identify other behaviors that might be appropriately decriminalized as preliminary steps toward abolition” (pg. 110). Many authors suggest a shift to a more communal dynamic where “prison no longer serves as our major anchor” (Davis, 2003, pg. 21) requiring that we “make connections between interpersonal violence, the violence inflicted by domestic

state institutions (such as prisons, detention centers, mental hospitals, and child protective services), and international violence (such as war, military base prostitution, and nuclear testing). Develop an analysis and strategies to end violence that do not isolate individual acts of violence (either committed by the state or individuals) from their larger contexts” (Incite!, 2011) This requires a centering of the most marginalized in society, so that no one is left behind in the process of reimagination (Incite, 2011, Dixon, et al., Ch. 1). Abolitionists argue that we must shift towards a more communal way, “a decent sense of community” (Davis, 2003, pg.105, quoting Arthur Waskow) where “we no longer acknowledge prisons as justice and policing as safety; so that we can collectively recognize abolitionism as prevention, care, and radical healing” (Briond, 2017). Abolitionists know that in order to shift ideology, you must start by “naming it” (Berger, et al., 2017) and in doing so it allows people to question and reimagine:

“What would the country look like if it had billions of extra dollars to spend on housing, food and education for all?” (Kaba, 2020)

“What is the world that we want? How will we define safety? How do we build the skills to address harm and violence? How do we create the trust needed for communities to rely on each other for mutual support?” (Dixon, et al., Ch. 1, pg. 22)

“What, then, would it mean to imagine a system in which punishment is not allowed to become the source of corporate profit? How can we imagine a society in which race and class are not primary determinants of punishment? Or one in which punishment itself is no longer the central concern in the making of justice?” (Davis, 2003 pg.. 107).

Ultimately, abolitionists want a shift in society that does not just remove police and prisons but makes them obsolete (Kaba, 2020), “removing the prison from the social and ideological landscapes of our society” (Davis, 2003, pg. 107).

Systemic Changes

Now we turn to the more “mezzo” level of solution building. Some of the ways in which abolitionists envision systems changing are through a re-envisioned approach to social welfare and public policy. Namely, a focus on removing or reducing poverty and its effects instead of penalizing its consequences. Some examples posited are to “re-envision our approach to child welfare from a punitive one to a community-based support network ” (Ritchie, 2017, p. 410), “decriminalize drug use” and develop “a constellation of free, community-based programs accessible to all people who wish to tackle their drug problems” (Davis, 2003, pg. 109), provide people with homes and quality healthcare (Bassichis, et al., 2011, Berger et al., 2017, Kaba, 2020), and offer more investment to rural areas (Gilmore, 2007). Additionally, labor practices and “good jobs” (Kaba 2020) are mentioned, including ending the exploitation of immigrant workers and advocating for a reality where “our working conditions and benefits should be generous. If we support a world in which we have time and resources to take care of ourselves, as well as our friends, families, and neighbors, we might not want to work sixty hours a week” (Bassichis, et al., 2011 pg. 32). Political education may also be necessary, working to help people dismantle the harmful ideologies that allow harm to fester, “...specifically [about] how sexual violence helps reproduce the colonial, racist, capitalist, heterosexist, and patriarchal society we live in as well as how state violence produces interpersonal violence within communities” (Incite!, 2011).

Community-Based Solutions and Relationships

Through a hybrid mezzo-micro lens, the solutions proposed by abolitionists often call for a stronger network of community relationships and systems of care, which requires not only changes to the immediate community but also one's interpersonal relationships. One such solution is the process of Transformative Justice. This practice leans away from reliance on police and prisons to solve issues and rectify harm done in community. As defined by Ejeris Dixon in Chapter one of "Beyond Survival: Strategies and stories from the Transformative Justice Movement (2020), "Transformative justice and community accountability are terms that describe ways to address violence without relying on police or prisons. These approaches often work to prevent violence, to intervene when harm is occurring, to hold people accountable, and to transform individuals and society to build safer communities " (p. 20) and "can happen in a variety of ways. Some groups support survivors by helping them identify their needs and boundaries while ensuring their attackers agree to these boundaries and atone for the harm they caused. Other groups create safe spaces and sanctuaries to support people escaping from violence. There are also community campaigns that educate community members on the specific dynamics of violence, how to prevent it, and what community-based programs are available" (pg. 21). Community connection and education is key, in the article "Against Carceral Feminism" (Law, 2014), the author outlines communities will be "challenged" to connect to one another to build the responses to violence, and will have to learn from their experiences. One such example is outlined in the article:

"In 2004, anti-violence advocate Mimi Kim founded Creative Interventions. Recognizing that alternative approaches to violence need to be demonstrated, the group developed a site to collect and publicly offer tools and resources on addressing violence in everyday

life. It also developed the StoryTelling and Organizing Project, where people can share their experiences of intervening in domestic violence, family violence, and sexual abuse” (Law, 2014).

Bassichis et al., (2011) discuss many different forms of mutual aid and collectivism that may be helpful including creating “community networks of care” to support people re-entering society from incarceration, people with disabilities and psychiatric conditions, and networks of political solidarity (2011, pg. 32). Collectivism stands as an antithesis to the “personal responsibility” and individualism that currently permeates our thinking. Bassichis et al., 2011, offers that

“Collectivism at its best takes up the concerns of the few as the concerns of the whole. For example, when one member of a group or community cannot attend an event or meeting because the building is not wheelchair accessible, it becomes a moment for all to examine and challenge ableism in our culture-instead of just dismissing it as a "problem" that affects only people who use wheelchairs” (pg. 29).

Abolitionist advocates for survivors of violence urge that this collectivism is necessary in order to protect and uphold the dignity of survivors, and caution against a romanticized idea of community that doesn’t actually come through (Incite!, 2011). In “Navigating justice for sexual abuse survivors, when you’re a prison abolitionist and a survivor” (2017), the author suggests that a community must “work toward protection and prevention, where survivors don’t feel it’s their sole responsibility to survive, heal, and search for a nearly non-existent justice for not only themselves but others who have been harmed” (Briond, 2017).

A sense of safety rests on relationships, in *Beyond Survival*, Dixon aptly puts it: “At its core, the work to create safety is to build meaningful, accountable relationships within our neighborhoods

and communities (2020, Ch. 1, pg. 23). One strategy is pod-mapping, as presented in Chapter 11, by Mia Mingus, a practical outlining tool for identifying one's support network outside of law enforcement and social services: "Your pod is made up of the people that you would call on if violence, harm, or abuse happened to you; if you wanted support in taking accountability for violence, harm, or abuse that you've done; if you witnessed violence; or if someone you care about was being violent or being abused" (Dixon et al., 2020, Ch. 11, pg. 179). An example of such is given in the article "Against Carceral Feminism" where the author cites an example from activist Leah Lakshmi Piepza-Samarasinha, where she utilizes a safety plan with her friends to help protect her and manage social situations with an abusive ex-partner (Law, 2014). In *Golden Gulag* (2007), Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds that these community-driven actions might seem small or insignificant, but that "when the capacities resulting from purposeful action are combined toward ends greater than mission statements or other provisional limits, powerful alignments begin to shake the ground. In other words, movement happens" (pg. 248).

5.3 Degrowth Critique

Degrowth critiques are concentrated heavily in Ideology (34), the state (31), and Capitalism/Labor (36, combined). There are also coding references to welfare state programs and public or social policies for a combined 17 references. There are no references to prisons or welfare reform.

Codes	Degrowth	Total
<input type="radio"/> Capitalism	13	13
<input type="radio"/> Labor	23	23
<input type="radio"/> Ideology	34	34
<input type="radio"/> Prisons	0	0
<input type="radio"/> Public or Social Policies	5	5
<input type="radio"/> The State	31	31
<input type="radio"/> Welfare Reform	0	0
<input type="radio"/> Welfare State-Programs	12	12
<input type="radio"/> Child Welfare System	0	0
Total	118	118

Ideology

This sample of literature on degrowth revealed several critiques of dominant ideologies. Of course the most obvious is the critique of economic growth as the paradigm that should inform how ‘well’ a country and its people are doing. In Dukelow and Murphy (2022), they call it the “growth imaginary” and critique how the current “political tradition” relies on divorcing our fulfillment from ecological limits (pg. 505). They highlight how productivism leads to wage-labor supremacy and “the ‘accumulative impulse’, which equates welfare with material affluence (Fitzpatrick, 1998). Consequently, it is extremely difficult to think outside production and consumption-based understandings of welfare” (pg. 506). “Green growth” they say, because it still operates within this impossible paradigm, “cannot adequately address the extent, intensity and velocity of contemporary environmental challenges. This approach adds an environmental ‘tick box’ to social policy analysis but does not fundamentally rethink how we live, work and relate within ecological limits” (pg. 506). In discussing degrowth and technology, Kerschner, et al. (2018) also critique this link between welfare and growth, highlighting “the lack of empirical support for a positive correlation between GDP growth and welfare” and the “‘master narrative of innovation for growth’ (Strand et al., 2018) based on the ‘linear model’: investment in science

yields technological innovation, which delivers economic growth, which in turn leads to job creation, welfare and prosperity including (technological) solutions to environmental problems” (pg. 1620). These are predicated on false ideas, they say that 1) technological advancements are “value neutral” and that 2) people just need to consume more environmentally conscious things to live better, instead of getting to the root that perhaps welfare does not lie within this paradigm of more consumption being the answer (pg. 1620). Degrowth scholars question the use of GDP growth as a measure of welfare, saying:

“ It does not capture the distribution of income in society, or the extent to which and how many members of society successfully have their basic needs met in the process of production and consumption. It does not measure health, happiness, education, equality of opportunity, or even whether the economy is headed for a crash” (Kreinen & Aigner, 2021, pg. 289).

In addition, Kreinen and Aigner also critique the pervasiveness of growth, likening it to an institution:

“Economic growth is an institution and tied to other institutions, rules, and norms in society, which make it harder to challenge. Societal institutions based on growth, requiring growth, or boosting growth are omnipresent, including full-time work (through the productivity trap), the welfare state, social services, and taxation, amongst others” (pg. 293).

This growth obsession, however, has not translated into more welfare in the Global North, as “huge levels of economic growth since the 1970s and 1980s, this has not translated into increases

in welfare because of stagnating wages and rising inequality” (Kreinen & Aigner, pg. 289), and in fact,

“...that high levels of inequality (measured in income, wealth, well-being and political rights) create a dependency on economic growth as a way to avoid redistribution for improving welfare outcomes (Kallis et al. 2012; Hickel 2019b). Inequality is a driver of economic growth as it drives individual consumption to keep up with higher income groups (Oh et al. 2012)” (pg. 294).

This never ending cycle of wage labor, consumption, comparison, and inequality creates a dangerous prospect for how we relate to the planet. Degrowth activists, thus, call for a shift in ideology that involves active consideration and involvement of the earth’s resources and capacity when making decisions about social policy, social welfare, and economics (Mikkelsen, 2019).

The State

The role of the state is heavily theorized and critiqued within degrowth scholarship, of course, as it is the mechanism by which growth is being justified and enacted and welfare is being administered. In “The state in transformation to a sustainable postgrowth economy” (Koch, 2020), the state’s role as a site for both the solution and the answer to environmental issues is critiqued. The state is identified as having a specific role to play in the administration of capitalism:

“Marx, in particular, linked the autonomous existence of the state to the structural prerequisites of an economy based on the circulation of commodities. In order to exchange goods, individuals must ‘recognize one another reciprocally as proprietors’ (Marx 1973, p. 243). This includes a ‘juridical moment’ since exchange relations are only

possible as long as the acting individuals are not prevented from entering them, for example, by feudal rule. Appropriating commodities through the use of force is equally not a legal or legitimate course of action. Therefore, respect of the principle of equivalence in exchange relations depends on a formally independent institution that guarantees the legal and economic independence of the owners of commodities: their equality, legal security, and protection” (pg. 117).

This then leads to the state being the “independent third party” that “above all, monopolises the legitimate use of physical force (Weber 1991, p. 78),” and “guarantees private property, the principle of equivalence, and the legal security of the economic subjects” (Koch, 2020, pgs. 117-118). This then also implicates the state in being a site for managing social relations and cohesion, and in order to do so must become a moral compass and arbiter of normality. Koch outlines that there are many different elements that inform the state’s moral code development, using Poulantzas’ (1978) term “condensation” to describe the state as “an object of agency of the ‘relationship of forces’ or socio-political coalition that creates and recreates it, and, at the same time, a powerful actor, whose policies shape a range of societal fields” (pg. 119). Taking into account this variety of social forces, the state then, “...‘educates’ consent: It ‘urges, incites, solicits, and ‘punishes’ ” to make ‘a certain way of life’ legitimate. This may include moral and punitive sanctions for the deviant” and ultimately “...facilitates the temporal stabilisation and maintenance of the social order via its force, laws and regulations, material and immaterial resources, as well as its discourses of legitimation” (pgs. 118-119). Koch (2020) then illustrates how when the state is playing such a crucial role in the administration of capitalism through the various means including social welfare and employment regulation it becomes conflicted in its role as arbiter of justice and discipline. Utilizing Bourdieu’s concept of the right and left hand of

the state and Gramsci's political and ethical dichotomy of the state, Koch (2020) illuminates how difficult it is for the state to become an apparatus for social change:

“In summary, Bourdieu and Gramsci highlight the possibility that the battles between the ‘right’ and ‘left’ hands or the ‘ethical’ and ‘political’ aspects of the state result in a political conjuncture that initiates social change beyond the capitalist status quo. This may include a structural move towards environmental sustainability. Especially, Poulantzas emphasises that the necessary structural pre-condition for such a re-orientation of state policies is bottom up mobilisation in the wider society” (pg. 119).

This highlights an important critique of the state, that given its complex role, it has no incentive and in fact tremendous barriers to become a site of transformation towards deprioritizing growth.

The state is also broadly critiqued through an examination of global north-south relations, offering strong admonition of the global north for its unfair exploitation of the global south.

Given that climate disaster is a global phenomenon it demands that all nations work together to solve the problem, yet without a fair assessment of the disparate impacts each faction has had on the issue, it is unlikely to get “buy-in” from the global south (Kreinen & Aigner, 2021, pg. 284).

As they outline in their assessment:

“Between 1990–2015, high-income countries have simultaneously appropriated resources with high-embodied material, labour and land from low-income countries, while generating monetary surplus though taking part in international trade – in effect keeping the Global North developed on the back of the Global South (Dorninger et al. 2021). This drain from the Global South to the Global North since the 1960s has totalled around \$62

trillion, or \$152 trillion (constant 2011 US Dollars) when also considering lost growth” (pg. 290).

Kreinen & Aigner (2021) critique this reality, calling it an “accountancy trick” for the North to, instead of improving, offset its emissions and issues to the South all while reaping the profits (pg. 291). Lee, et al. (2023) also notes this dynamic, criticizing the Western consumption patterns:

“Considering ecological and carbon footprints, Western material welfare standards were at no point in time generalizable to the rest of the planet (Fritz and Koch 2016; O’Neill et al. 2018)—despite the fact that these were culturally celebrated, ideologically reinforced, and exported to many other parts of the world. Indeed, had citizens of all nations led similar ways of life as Westerners, the planet would have ended up in acute climate emergency significantly earlier” (pg. 5).

Overall, the literature points to a realization that Western, or Global North, consumption patterns are not only unsustainable but actively harmful to the entire globe. If degrowth were to take hold, the Global North would have to seriously reckon with its patterns and history, and take an equitable approach to how degrowth strategy would look in the South, given their (intentionally designed) disadvantage.

Capitalism and Labor

Capitalism as both an ideology and mode of operation through the labor market is discussed throughout the sample of literature. The most overarching critique is found in Saave and Muraca’s “Rethinking Labour/Work in a Degrowth Society” (2021) where they state “environmental interventions embedded into the hegemonic paradigm of growth are bound to fail

because, as the degrowth movement has been articulating for decades, capitalist growth itself is part of the problem and not of the solution” (pg. 743). They discuss, borrowing logic from Pérez Orozco’s feminist appraisal of capitalism, how there is a “fundamental, structural contradiction between accumulation processes and processes that sustain life” (pg. 760). Capitalism and wage labor require people to sell their labor and place their time commodities with employers rather than their families and communities. The necessity to engage in production as a means to make a living also inadvertently implicates workers in the exacerbation of the environment. In their critique of labor as a natural function of human life, in a call for revised ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ for the United Nations, Kreinen and Aigner (2021) discuss how: “social scientists have long established that we are living in a work-centered society, where daily lives depend on employment, independently of the value it contributes to societal or individual welfare, or indeed its environmental impacts” (pg. 295). This results in negative personal effects in the form of health problems and time away from family and friends (pg. 295) as well as environmental effects, with “average working hours in the US between 2007–2013 as an example had a strong positive relationship to carbon emissions (Fitzgerald et al. 2018) and similar effects can be seen in other studies on Germany and Italy with regard to energy use per hour worked” (Kreinen & Aigner, 2021, pg. 296). Additionally, industries that are environmentally destructive also require workers to fuel their output, creating an “urgent need to limit the work of certain sectors: i.e. mining, fracking, deforestation, aviation, shipping and animal agriculture” (pg. 296). In summary, capitalism necessitates wage labor which is inextricably linked to growth, and must therefore be rethought and reframed.

Welfare Programs and Public and Social Policies

The degrowth ‘critique’ of welfare programs and policies lie in two camps. The first is an assessment of the welfare state’s inherent association with growth given its reliance on wage labor to produce a tax base to fund itself. The second is a critique of the way in which the welfare state replicates or exacerbates productivist ideology by requiring wage labor in order to receive benefits and the lack of consideration for the environment in building social policy.

In “Building the Future from the Present: Imagining Post-Growth, Post-Productivist Ecosocial Policy” the authors outline the welfare state’s role in directing people towards socially acceptable activities, primarily, wage labor: “contemporary welfare models, based on social insurance and/or means testing, are overly prescriptive requiring that claimants meet productivist conditions of eligibility, entitlement and conduct and are embedded in the logic of growth” (Dukelow & Murphy, 2022, pg. 511), requiring that they engage in employment based activity to qualify for help. Lee, et al. (2023) discuss this as the welfare-work nexus, citing the historical development of welfare states as “an attempt to combine capitalist economies and liberal democracies through the establishment of welfare systems, the state began to use the growing tax take from the primary incomes of the labour market parties to create and/or expand welfare systems to cover risks such as old age, sickness, and unemployment” (pg. 4). However, put so succinctly by Kreinen and Aiger (2022):

“The narrow dependence on paid employment as the road to societal services i.e. healthcare, education, housing, effectively make work an institution of societal control (Weeks 2011; Frayne 2015, 2016). This reflects a societal shift from welfare to workfare, and has serious consequences for staying within planetary limits while providing societal welfare, due to the escalatory logic of the growth system” (pg. 294).

This is an important point of the critique, “when access to services is institutionalised on the basis of formal employment, this implies that those without access to work are excluded from basic services” (Kreinen & Aiger, 2022, pg. 249). This reinforces the need for people to engage in wage labor to be protected by their welfare state, disincentivizing people and the state to move towards environmentally-conscious social policy and welfare programs (Dukelow & Murphy, 2022).

5.4 Degrowth Solutions

Degrowth solutions take many forms, all centered around reducing or eliminating the dependency of the state and individuals on economic growth. Most of the solutions involve ideological shifts about the way in which we function as a society, with 47 coding references. Close behind is the desire for systemic changes (43), community based solutions (14), democratic processes (13). Gender equality, economic, doughnut space, relationships and sustainable welfare all had low references and were incorporated under other themes.

Codes	Degrowth	Total
<input type="radio"/> Community-Based Solutions	14	14
<input type="radio"/> Democratic Processes	13	13
<input type="radio"/> Doughnut Space	2	2
<input type="radio"/> Economic	7	7
<input type="radio"/> Gender Equality	10	10
<input type="radio"/> Ideological	47	47
<input type="radio"/> Personal Improvement	0	0
<input type="radio"/> Relationships	6	6
<input type="radio"/> Storytelling	0	0
<input type="radio"/> Sustainable Welfare	3	3
<input type="radio"/> Systemic	43	43
Total	145	145

Ideological

One proposed solution is decommodification, “a fundamental re-think of work and welfare” (Dukelow and Murphy, 2022, pg. 513) where work is no longer the ultimate human accomplishment. Instead, Dukelow and Murphy (2022) suggest moving away from activation policy as the forefront in social welfare and instead valuing and allowing the contributions that people can make to their society and communities outside of wage labor, even encouraging them to participate in activities that encourage sustainability. Kreinen and Aigner (2021) also echo the need for this ideological shift, reminding that unemployment is socially constructed:

“One common mistake in that regard is that it is assumed that a lack of unemployment is an outcome of a lack of available jobs. Unemployment is currently measured in terms of people looking for work. However, unemployment can also be reduced by ensuring a good life without employment, or with other policies (work time reduction, jobs guarantee, job sharing, basic services and even income) which allow for a dignified life outside work, or reduce the pressures of the duty to work. This would alleviate the environmental costs of employment and the social costs of unemployment” (pg. 293).

Without the curtails of the growth paradigm, we can expand our idea of what productivity looks like, prioritizing work that adds social value and allows for a decent quality of life rather than serves as a means to an end (economic growth) that degrowth scholars argue is unsustainable. Mikkelsen (2019) provides an idea of what this might look like:

“their analysis, like the present one, suggests that people working less tend “to engage in more self-sufficient activities (e.g., gardening) or time-intensive, low-impact activities such as walking and biking to work instead of driving.” These tendencies compensate for

whatever inclinations people with more leisure time might have to “take more vacations by auto or air . . . or have greater involvement in . . . shopping” or “other energy consuming activities” (p. 694)” (pg. 294).

Mikkelson (2019) also suggests worker cooperatives, unions, and democratically elected boards as a step that can, quoting Boothe, “move in the direction of an economy where employees own and control the businesses for which they work” and thus “finally “unhook modern society from high rates of growth and . . . bring the process of environmental degradation to a halt” (pg. 295).

Similarly, Saave and Muraca (2021) call for a “liberation from alienation and oppression and a path towards a better life for all beyond the diktat of productivism that structures the wage labour system and precludes alternative imaginaries” (pg. 747). As they discuss:

“The distribution of and access to goods and services does not have to depend on wage or salary. Decoupling income and labour, for example, through the introduction of an unconditional basic income or similar policies is proposed as a solution to unemployment and a path of decommodification (in synergy with the former approach) (Liegey et al. 2013). In a similar vein, Alcott (2013) suggests decoupling work and income by considering work as a political right and introducing a Job Guarantee programme” (pg. 750).

Degrowth scholars see the best path away from the inextricably linked wage labor and growth connection to be decommodification, where people are valued beyond what they can produce and are encouraged to utilize their time for other pursuits beyond wage labor. In doing so, not only is there a foreseeable path away from the current ideological system of work as a natural

function of human life (Kreinen & Aigner, 2021), but the environment has the potential to benefit as well.

Another ideological shift discussed in the degrowth solutions is a shift in the way well-being and welfare are conceptualized. This includes shifting our social political priorities to include the planet, conceptualized by Kreinen & Aigner (2021) as “the well-being of non-human beings and ecosystems” (pg. 290). There are various frameworks offered to achieve this, including Raworth’s (2017) “doughnut space,” as mentioned by Lee, et al. (2017) and Dukelow and Murphy (2022). This framework holds that “‘development’ of economy and society may proceed within a doughnut-shaped space (Raworth 2017), where resource use is below planetary limits (the outer boundary or the “safe” and ecologically sustainable space) but above the sufficiency level required to meet people’s basic needs (the inner boundary or the socially “just” space)” (pg. 5). When turning towards the idea of human need, degrowth scholars also wrestle with a needed ideological shift, where income restrictions and caps may lead to changing lifestyles for people across the income spectrum which has the potential to result in dire circumstances for those already disadvantaged. Instead, as an example, Koch (2020) turns to Gough for ideas on how to re-shape these ideas, quoting, “As a guideline, Gough (2017, p. 174) suggests that needs of the present ‘should always take precedence over the basic needs of the future’ but ‘basic needs of the future should take precedence over the extravagant luxury of the present.’” There is no singular theory on how best to conceptualize human need found in these articles, however Koch (2020) does acknowledge that

“the central welfare concern is not ‘wants’ or the unlimited provision of material riches for the ‘happy few’ in Western societies but the satisfaction of basic needs for all humans now and in the future. Needs differ from wants and preferences in that they are

non-negotiable and universalisable and that failure to satisfy these produces serious harm (Gough 2017)” and that “critical thresholds for the universal provision of human needs or for a ‘minimally decent life’ would constantly be (re-)defined in light of the advances of scientific and practical knowledge” (pg. 124).

Overall, the ideological shifts imagined by degrowth scholars are framed around rethinking the relationship to work and time, and re-configuring the way we view our needs in order to accommodate a ideology that accounts for the environmental impact of our desires, both large and small scale.

Systemic

Accompanying these ideological shifts, there are ample suggestions for systemic changes that could help achieve a post growth society. Of note, are the ideas of redistributing wealth and income and moving towards commoning and shared ownership. At the macro level, Koch (2020) discusses the role the state could play in regulation, “ensuring that production and consumption processes do not exceed critical thresholds for matter and energy throughput” (pg. 127). The state in this scenario would play an “active interventionist” role, where coupled with “a combination of bottom-up mobilisations and action and top-down regulation, resulting in a new mix of property forms including communal, state, and individual property and a new division of labour between market, state, and ‘commons’” (pg. 127) could arise. Some economic solutions include decommodifying pensions and shifting to Nordic-like ‘universal caregiver schemes’ for parents (Dukelow & Murphy, 2022), provision of unconditional Universal Basic Income, “expansion or introduction of universal basic services (UBS),” and voucher systems (Lee, et al., 2023, pg. 4). Additionally, wealth caps and income redistribution are a popular solution, although no concrete proposals are really addressed as creating a solution for not yet existing taxation and

social structure proves difficult (Lee, et al., 2023, Thomson, 2011, Saave and Muraca, 2021, Koch, 2020, Muraca 2012).

On the mezzo level, communities might band together to collectivize ownership over things such as WiFi, public space, currency and even leadership as is the case in the El Pumarejo village as outlined by Lloveras, et al. (2017). Another closely related idea calls for the “collective provisioning systems (health care centres, public transport, garbage disposal, as well as access to shelter, sanitation and minimum floor area)” (Kreinen, Aigner, 2022, pg. 289). More community-based solutions will be discussed in the next section.

Community-Based Solutions and Democratic Processes

An important aspect of the degrowth imaginary in regards to the mezzo and micro level solutions are the value of democratically held processes. Five sources especially mention envisioning solutions and alternative societies that make decisions through democratic processes Dukelow and Murphy (2022) discuss how:

“An ecosocial welfare architecture must also be informed by active citizenship, and participative and deliberative democratic processes that inform, educate and give voice to different public interests, complementing representative democratic processes and mediating the inevitable political conflict in bringing to life an ecosocial post-growth world” (pg. 511).

In designing a study on what Swedish citizens could imagine for the welfare state, Lee, et al. (2017) highlighted the particularly important methodological choice they made to do citizen forums, citing that:

“Policy deliberations circling around the framework of a safe and just operating space and welfare provisioning systems have addressed maximum and minimum levels for needs satisfaction as well as ecosocial policy instruments with the potential of steering economy and society toward respecting such “floors and ceilings” (Gough 2020).

Corresponding policy suggestions have been tabled in various areas, ranging from macroeconomic steering, inequality/redistribution via carbon rationing, and consumption to work-time regulation. There is agreement, especially among sustainable welfare scholars, that turning these policy suggestions into reality would require, on top of “bottom-up” civil society engagement (Buch-Hansen 2018; Koch 2022b), an actively intervening state (Koch 2020)” (pg. 8).

Citizen forums or other convenings where communities are allowed to voice their concerns, ideas, wisdom, and expertise have been crucial to the maintenance of the degrowth activist community in El Pumarejo. Called ‘assemblies,’ they:

“were frequently experienced as central to decision-making processes in El Pumarejo. The ‘assembly’ can be likened to a political process through which people gather to address issues in a direct democratic manner. Assemblies are justified in the sense that actual and potential users of the urban commons have both a right and a duty to represent themselves in the process by which the commons are managed. This is particularly evident in the following activist’s comment: Even if access is open and secured for all, I would not dare to call something a ‘common’ unless everyone feels empowered to participate in the process of creation. (Male, 38, Member of Degrowth Seville.)” (Lloveras, et al., 2017, pg. 195).

In El Pumarejo, “any action or initiative can only gain legitimacy if it has been subject to assembly” (pg. 195). Koch (2020) also theorizes that a possible division of power could be

“A new division of labour between the various regulatory levels is envisioned by Kothari (2018, p. 254) who proposes assigning ‘a minimal set of matters’ to the global level, while the bulk of decision-making would ‘go to the most local level feasible’, where he assumes that diverse approaches to meeting collective goals are most ‘accepted and encouraged” (pg. 125).

This idea that decisions should be made locally and collectively makes sense in a framework of a strong community. It seems that degrowth theorists believe that a strong community is not only possible but a necessity when economic growth is deprioritized. This requires a major downscaling economy to the local level, “these highlight the need to replace the current global production and trade systems with economies based on cooperative principles and oriented towards local production and consumption cycles” (Koch, 2020, pg. 125). It is theorized that this localized system would prioritize collectivity:

“While in a market economy, the goods and services used to satisfy the human needs are provided in a profit motivated system regulated by prices, in an economy of reciprocity the production and the exchange of goods and services are also intended as means for improving cooperation, conviviality and social relationships. These newly introduced mechanisms are expected to produce a positive feedback on the satisfaction of the individual and, in a broader sense on his well-being, without heavily impinging on the available resources” (Andreoni and Galamari, 2013, pg. 79).

One mechanism discussed by Dukelow and Murphy (2022) that builds on this collectivist mindset and combines social transfers is Participation Income (PI):

“a targeted income support enabling engagement in social, ecological and democratic activity that fosters sustainable outcomes, might better enable transition to a decommodified, post-growth and post-productivist future, and better complement a universal provision of social services, erode consumerism, and foster solidaristic and sustainable lives” (pgs. 510-511).

They describe that “a PI can incorporate a broad range of activity (education, care, voluntary work, political participation, life-long learning, reproduction, satisfying essential needs unmet by the market and environmental reproduction), or be narrowly targeted” (pg. 511). Ultimately, this individualized program could support a stronger communal structure. With more time and financial support, imagine the impact we could have on our livelihoods.

Finally, we turn one last time to the case study of El Pumarejo, where common spaces are communally maintained for an example of an alternative vision rooted in solidarity and mutuality, aided by the resource of time to contribute:

“...the creation of common space by degrowth-minded activists ‘signals a relationship of shared sociality [which] entails a belief in the reciprocal tie that is manifest in future acts of giving by the receiving party’ (Arnould and Rose, 2015: 2). Subsequently, activists’ involvement in the production of common resources is not to be interpreted as an act of altruism as such, but one that is both ‘socially interested’ and enveloped in a ‘normative overlay’ (ibid.). Subsequently, accessibility in El Pumarejo relies not only on individual acts of selflessness, but also on chains of solidarity whose creation is animated by a

politically infused sense of responsibility towards mutual support” (Lloveras, et al., 2017, pg. 195).

This level of conviviality necessitates prioritization of coexistence, what Lloveras, et al. (2017) describe in El Pumarejo as a relaxation of social norms, flexible boundaries, and acknowledgement of the “inherent diversity of lifeworlds” (pg. 198) and what Saave and Muraca (2022) describe as “recuperating the sense of horizontal interdependence and vulnerability of all life collectively embodied in a buen convivir (good living together) rooted in autonomy and self-determination” (pg. 761).

6. Analysis and Discussion

When analyzing the coding references, we see that abolition and degrowth both heavily critique the welfare state along the themes of ideology, the role of the state, and programs. They differ in that abolition has many references to prisons and welfare reform but degrowth does not.

Degrowth also more heavily critiqued capitalism with a combined capitalism/labor reference point of 36 compared to abolition’s 15 references.

Codes	Abolition	Degrowth	Total
<input type="radio"/> Capitalism	8	13	21
<input type="radio"/> Labor	7	23	30
<input type="radio"/> Ideology	51	34	85
<input type="radio"/> Prisons	17	0	17
<input type="radio"/> Public or Social Policies	10	5	15
<input type="radio"/> The State	39	31	70
<input type="radio"/> Welfare Reform	8	0	8
<input type="radio"/> Welfare State-Programs	26	12	38
<input type="radio"/> Child Welfare System	12	0	12
Total	178	118	296

Within solution building, abolition and degrowth both call heavily for ideological shifts in our present systems, with abolition referencing so 30 times and degrowth 47. This makes a lot of sense given their ontological standpoints. Similarly, they also both heavily call for systemic solutions, with 29 references for abolition and 43 for degrowth. Next most popular is community-based solutions with 20 in abolition and 14 in degrowth. A notable difference is the lack of codes under democratic processes in abolition whereas it was prevalent (13) in degrowth literature. The literature revealed that while abolition does discuss community-based solutions a lot, it does not explicitly share the value of democratic processes as degrowth. This could be due to degrowth's strong emphasis on a just transition, a recognition of the intensity of the change they are proposing to people's lives and an "olive-branch" to reduce anxiety.

Codes	Abolition	Degrowth	Total
<input type="radio"/> Community-Based Solutions	20	14	34
<input type="radio"/> Democratic Processes	0	13	13
<input type="radio"/> Doughnut Space	0	2	2
<input type="radio"/> Economic	2	7	9
<input type="radio"/> Gender Equality	3	10	13
<input type="radio"/> Ideological	30	47	77
<input type="radio"/> Personal Improvement	2	0	2
<input type="radio"/> Relationships	10	6	16
<input type="radio"/> Storytelling	3	0	3
<input type="radio"/> Sustainable Welfare	0	3	3
<input type="radio"/> Systemic	29	43	72
Total	99	145	244

Utilizing the socioecological model as a framework, starting from the outermost layer, we can see that abolition and degrowth both critique the societal, or macro level, of the state by critiquing its development into something that pursues profit and power over welfare, abolition

takes an especially critical look at this through the criminal-legal system but also acknowledges the systems they critique as destructive to non-human life and nature as well. On the flipside, there were no mentions of police or prisons in degrowth literature. Both also engage in critique of the Global North, with abolition paying special attention to the military endeavors of the U.S. state and degrowth taking a more substantial critique of its material impact on the South. Both theories are engaged in the literature with a critique of the way the state exerts its power over citizens, and maintain a “monopoly” over legitimate violence.

Within a framework of sociological imagination, we can see in the literature a clear similarity between the way in which degrowth and abolition locate their critiques in history. They both critique the welfare state as being an inadequate bandaid developed to ameliorate the woes of capitalism and volatile labor markets. This allows them an important convergence around their critique of the relationship between people and their labor and time wealth. In their imagining of solutions outside the current system, both reckon with the need for more *time*. In the case of degrowth, time away from working is a necessary requisite to downscaling the economy and in abolition, time allows for more dedication to the community based solutions dreamed of. To me there is a clear possibility for integration here. If abolitionists value having more time to dismantle the systems they seek to and build up communities of care then degrowth’s call to downscale the economy, creating a postgrowth society with less work and more time for community engagement (idealized as somehow being paid, too!), could certainly be a helpful framework. On the reverse side, degrowth calls for a downscaled economy but isn’t sure how to get there equitably, taking into account the disparate social realities embedded in Western capitalist societies. The social imaginary present in abolitionist solution-building can be helpful to degrowth’s visions of collectivism and commoning. Abolition takes a strong mezzo and micro

level approach to its solutions, calling for the centering of the most marginalized in all decisions and unabashedly addressing racism and sexism. As is shown in the example of El Pumarejo (Lloveras, et al., 2018), working together to create a society outside the bounds of growth requires tremendous interpersonal work and the dismantling of oppressive ways of relating. A point of departure to ground this point is found in “Rethinking Labour/Work in a Degrowth Society” (Saave & Muraca, 2021):

“Maria Mies (1986) analyses the dependence of economic growth on society-nature-relations and gender-relations to delineate a future economy. According to Mies, only by including all relations of production created by capitalist patriarchy and by adopting a global and holistic approach, scholars and activists can develop a vision of a future society, in which women, nature, and colonized others are no longer exploited in the name of development and growth (ibidem). Mies does not only unveil the growth diktat as a major driving force for unsustainable and unjust societal relations. She also shows its patriarchal roots, a perspective that has been only marginally considered in the degrowth discourse” (pg. 757).

Abolition fits right into this assessment, with its critique of racialized and gendered state violence at the hands of police and prisons being a prime example of an “unjust societal relation.”

Another similarity lies in the hyper-local approach called for in each theory. While degrowth offers things like “democratized households, rooted in ‘intimacy networks’ and elective families... supported by ‘proximity networks’ organized in a commons-based way” (Saave & Muraca, 202, pg. 761), abolition offers things like pod-maps and collective protection against abusers (Dixon, et al., 2020, Ch. 11).

One large difference noticed in the data is that abolitionist literature is much more inclined towards anarchistic solutions whereas some degrowth literature still leans on the state as a mechanism that can be relied on to help facilitate change. Many abolitionist articles argued differently, hoping for radical solutions that completely subvert the state. To simplify, it can be said that abolitionists hope to subvert the state in their future-building while degrowthers only hope to shrink the state.

Another dissimilarity is how abolition takes up its critique of welfare programs, public policy, and especially the child welfare system. It is clear from this sample of literature that abolitionists envision a socioecological relationship between the family and society where if there issues of poverty causing harm to a child, there are systems outside of penalism available. This sampling of degrowth literature never takes up this same critique. Additionally, in its critique of welfare programs and policies, abolition literature takes great issue with the neoliberal divestment from welfare programs and impetus on personal responsibility, finding it void of compassion and context. The degrowth literature, while also highly critical of neoliberalism, critiques the fact that welfare programs encourage a productivist mentality and are thus heavily reliant on the labor market, wage labor and activation policies.

Overall, ontologically, these two theories find similarity in their mission; neither is seeking to completely abandon current systems, instead they want a gradual but urgent transition to what they view as necessary and just new arrangements for society and social welfare. They both intensely take up ideological criticism that seeks to fundamentally shift the way we think about social welfare and our relationships to our individual and our communal well-being. They both call for societies rooted in conviviality and conscience, with the material and time resources to do so.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, this study sought to place two very radical theories, degrowth and abolition, in conversation with one another through an examination of how they critique the welfare state and envision new realities. They have some notable similarities and differences, finding themselves aligned especially in their disdain for the ill-effects of capitalism on every level, individually, communally, and even globally. They both imagine welfare systems that rely on mutual aid and collectivism, where humans are able to more freely care for one another under the precipice of a less violent state apparatus. They are both highly critical of neoliberal social welfare and policies that reduce the dignity and decommodification of individuals. These similarities and even the differences suggest they are uniquely poised to offer each other deeper analysis. However, more research is needed to be able to fully support the hypothesis that an integrated degrowth-abolition theory could be beneficial to welfare state scholars. In the meantime, on their own, they offer spectacular critique and solution, much of which is outlined in this project and will hopefully be useful to future researchers.

7.1 Limitations, Critiques, and Future Research

An important critique of this thesis is that it is highly theoretical and seeks to be generalizable, but the sample size is relatively small when one considers how much literature must be out in the world about each topic. Upon reflection, it may have been better to focus only on seminal literature to complement the foundational nature of the study. It is nonetheless a hopefully helpful review and if complemented by more studies that are either more robust or inclusive of more methods, it could potentially reach generalizability. I also believe that this study has an overwhelming amount of material that made it difficult to synthesize. I think that if I had focused on seminal literature and used a smaller sample size, case-study format, I may have been able to

have more focused codes and a better more descriptive handle on the data. Additionally, there was a challenge in comparing a geographically-wound theory like abolition and a less geographically descriptive theory like degrowth. This is especially exacerbated by the lack of degrowth discourse in the United States and the lack of abolition discourse in Europe. But, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore puts it:

“in scholarly research, answers are only as good as the further questions they provoke, while for activists, answers are as good as the tactics they make possible. Where scholarship and activism overlap is in the area of how to make decisions about what comes next” (pg. 27).

My sincere hope is that this paper lends itself to the scholar-activist tradition and not only provides a step in the staircase towards future research integrating these two theories, but offers something tangible to the activists working within each discipline.

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