

## **Degrowth and feminisms ally to forge care-full paths beyond pandemic**

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### **Abstract**

This article describes four initiatives in which degrowth and feminist activists mobilize collaborative analysis and communication in efforts to influence paths through and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The efforts work together to identify and advance actions that help our societies to address and emerge from this global disaster in more humane, just, and sustainable ways. We join other social movements in asking: How can we seize opportunities to build healthier values, social arrangements, and policies? To slow down the rush toward future disasters? Highlight is on caring and commoning as features of desired worlds ahead, and as means and methods in our own organization and activism.

### **Key Words**

Degrowth, feminism, COVID-19, care, mobilization

### **Moves toward radical redirection**

Degrowth advocates seek to reduce ongoing harm to humans and earth systems by reorienting values, practices, and institutions away from economic expansion and toward equitable and sustainable wellbeing. Different actors work toward these goals via everyday practices, communal initiatives, scholarly theory, and policy recommendations (e.g., Gezon and Paulson 2017; Kallis 2018; Kallis *et al.* 2020; Treu and Schmelzer 2020). This article shares processes and outcomes of four overlapping initiatives that mobilize for change via collaborative analysis and writing, and by communicating shared understandings among diverse audiences. All coincide in foregrounding caring and commoning as engines for getting through the pandemic, in policies and actions toward healthier futures, and as characteristics of our own practices.

First is Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance (FaDA), an inclusive network of activists and scholars launched in 2016 at the 5th International Degrowth Conference in Budapest. A 2017 survey carried out by Jolanda Iserlohn revealed that members are located in wide-ranging contexts around the world, and bring to the network an immense variety of activist, academic, household, and professional experiences.

During March and April 2020, around 40 participants of this network, quarantined in locations ranging from Chile to Finland, joined in a series of virtual conversations that mixed strategizing for political change with mutual encouragement for facing immediate challenges. After circulating ideas and drafts, the group produced two messages communicated to the public on April 20, 2020: [“Feminist degrowth reflections on COVID-19 and the Politics of Social](#)

[Reproduction](#)” and “[Collaborative Feminist Degrowth: Pandemic as an Opening for a Care-Full Radical Transformation](#).” To reach beyond English language speakers, the messages were translated into [Finnish](#) (Suomi), [German](#) (Deutsch), [Greek](#) (Ελληνικό), [Italian](#) (Italiano), [Spanish](#) (Español), [Turkish](#) (Türkçe). The call for a “Care-full radical transformation” begins:

The crisis we face as a global community must be understood not only as a public health crisis, or as an economic crisis of the capitalist mode of production, but also, fundamentally, as a crisis of the reproduction of life. In this sense, it is a crisis of care: the work of caring for humans, non-humans, and the shared biosphere. The pandemic is a historical rupture . . . we take this opportunity to reflect on how we can, from our diverse positions, face this moment, organize, and collectively imagine radical alternative modes of living: those with more time for community, relationship building, and care for each other as well as the non-human world.

A second, parallel, processes of collaborative thinking and writing led to the dissemination, three weeks later, of [Degrowth: New Roots for the Economy. Re-imagining the Future After the Corona Crisis](#). This open letter, signed by more than 1,100 individuals and 70 organizations from 60 countries, calls for various sectors of global populations to embrace five principles to guide responses to COVID-19 crises and economic recovery: (1) Put life at the center of our economic systems, not economic growth; (2) Radically re-evaluate how much and what work is necessary for a good life for all, emphasizing care work; (3) Organize society around the provision of essential goods and services, minimizing wasteful practices; (4) Democratize societies, struggling against authoritarian and technocratic tendencies; and (5) Base political and economic systems on the principle of solidarity, rather than competition and greed.

Like FaDA’s messages, this letter was mobilized to bring diverse audiences into conversation. It was translated into 19 languages, and published in Open Democracy (UK), Mediapart (France), The Wire (India), HGV (Hungary), Pagina 12 (Argentina), Yeşil Gazete (Turkey), ctxt (Spain), Italia Che Cambia (Italy), UDRŽITELNÝ NERŮST (Czech Republic), Ricochet (Quebec), Sin Embargo (Mexico) and Information (Denmark), among other [media outlets](#).

Rapid actions like these global communications are nurtured by slower processes of collaborative learning demonstrated by a third initiative, a team of four activist scholars whose collaborations in teaching, conferences, and writing led to the 2020 book [The Case for Degrowth](#). Joining many others in arguing that perpetual growth is harmful and doomed, this publication also provides encouraging examples and reachable proposals for healthier ways forward in daily practices and values, communal organizing, government policies, and political mobilization. In the recent article [The case for degrowth in a time of pandemic](#), the authors show how their proposals address current challenges.

Promoting dialogue and debate among these and other intellectual projects, while building convivial solidarity and trust among diverse actors and organizers, are

goals of the fourth initiative discussed here: the world conference “[Degrowth Vienna 2020 – Strategies for social-ecological transformation](#)” held May 29 - June 1. The call for participation foregrounded the conference’s strategy for learning across differences:

By bringing together practitioners, artists, activists, civil society actors and scientists, we want to integrate different kinds of existing expertise and elaborate promising approaches to transforming the economy in a socially just and ecologically viable way. The conference will have a participatory design, including a thorough documentation process that will generate concrete outcomes for the degrowth movement and research society.

Observing that expert factual knowledge has not been sufficient to move societies toward healthier paths, degrowth and feminist activists seek more holistic approaches that connect with bodily and emotional feelings. In workshops, summer camps, and other gatherings, we have been experimenting with learning and communication strategies that go beyond scientific lectures to include theater, makers spaces, graphic facilitation, artwork, and more. Participants at previous world degrowth conferences were charged with energy by parading through the streets of Budapest, and by sharing locally-grown vegetarian meals at Descrecimiento México. Below, we learn how organizers responded to the daunting challenges of hosting a participatory world gathering in 2020, amid quarantines that limit corporeal conviviality.

With the goal of fostering dialogue among social movements and communities, the following discussion shares ideas and approaches from each of these initiatives. The text draws from and complements the short article [From pandemic toward care-full degrowth](#) published in the *Interface* series [Social movements in and beyond the COVID-19 crisis: sharing stories of struggles](#).

### **What does growth have to do with pandemic?**

Social movements have long attacked the pursuit of profit as a root of ecological and social degradation, and degrowth focuses explicitly on halting the drive for relentlessly expanding production and consumption. The open letter “New Roots for the Economy” observes,

The crisis triggered by the Coronavirus has already exposed many weaknesses of our growth-obsessed capitalist economy – insecurity for many, healthcare systems crippled by years of austerity and the undervaluation of some of the most essential professions. This system, rooted in exploitation of people and nature, which is severely prone to crises, was nevertheless considered normal.

Today, it is tempting to portray the COVID-19 pandemic as tangible proof of limits to growth, a messianic reckoning for our profligate ways. But such a claim would be naïve; epidemics have spread in the past and will in the future. What is clear is that the speed and scope of this contagion have been accelerated by global economic dynamics, while the growing ease with which viruses like HIV, SARS, MERS and COVID jump from animals to humans is enabled by the expansion of industrial agriculture, ranching, and other human encroachment on habitats, as well as the commodification of wildlife, all motivated by drive for profit.

Slow and ineffectual responses of leaders like Bolsonaro, Johnson, and Trump, as well as impulses to restart economies before the pandemic has waned, can also be understood in the context of ongoing pushes to sustain growth. Government capacities to respond have been eroded by budget cuts to public health and social infrastructures, enacted as public funds were redirected to subsidize expansion of private ventures. Ongoing struggles to fund and mobilize responses to public health emergencies contrasts with the agility with which national guard and other military forces were mobilized to protect property during recent protests in the US.

A dangerous dimension of pushes for growth is the rejection of scientific evidence and advice. In order to defend fossil fuel, climate change deniers have undermined faith in science, opening the way for politicians to shun a range of findings that threaten economic expansion; some had cut funding for pandemic research units and epidemic control teams, as well as studies on mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Even as COVID-19 spread, a number of leaders refused to respond to scientific findings and protocols (such as distancing, testing, and protective equipment) until pushed to do so by courageous protests of health workers, civil society, and other actors.

### **Paths toward more equitable and sustainable societies**

Contrary to claims of [some critics](#), the ravages of COVID-19 do not represent degrowth worlds strived for by social movements. Yes, the health crisis has provoked declines in natural resources used and waste generated, giving welcome respite to ecosystems. And yes, the lives of *some* people have slowed down, as ambitious schedules give way to more time for reflection and relationships. But no, unevenly-suffered trauma, impoverishment, and death are not features of degrowth; on the contrary, these are precisely the kind of phenomena that planned degrowth aims to avoid.

We would like to see societies slow down by design, not disaster. However, it looks like transitions away from growth may be largely unplanned and messy, in conditions not of our own choosing. Conditions like the ones we are living through now. So, finding ourselves amid global disaster, we join other social movements in asking: How can we seize opportunities to advance values, social arrangements, and policies that help us move toward more livable and just worlds? That slow down the rush toward future disasters?

Like those in other social movements, activists discussed here insist on connecting immediate responses to deeper structural transformations. The problems we

address did not appear with the coronavirus. They are produced and reproduced by hierarchical and exploitative social systems that took form several centuries ago with colonial capitalism, then continued to evolve in varied contexts. Key here are historically-specific systems of race and gender adapted to engineer and to justify forms of appropriation that support economic growth. Shared critique of these historical forces nourish alliances among degrowth and decolonial feminisms, even as they mark distance from liberal feminisms and green growth.

Transformative responses will require synergy among diverse perspectives and movements. Our most immediate case for including degrowth in this allied front is that its fundamental practices—modest living based in cooperation, conviviality, sharing, and caring—are desirable in and of themselves. Even when there seems little hope of establishing societies characterized by dignified work, equitable and solidary communities, respect for natural environments, we can already exercise and begin to embody these practices, enjoying their intrinsic rewards as we take steps toward feminist degrowth worlds to come.

In spite of the beautiful simplicity of these core principles, putting them into practice requires struggle and negotiation. In addition to battling forces aggressively defending various aspects of the status quo, we face quotidian conflicts around our own common senses and expectations, inherited ideas about aesthetics, propriety, respect that are internalized in our bodies and relationships, including our professional and academic practices. In an [essay on challenges faced in organizing the Vienna 2020 Conference](#), Nathan Barlow reflects on debates about how and to what extent conference processes and logistics should coincide with degrowth visions, and who establishes degrowth standards for conference organizing.

Should we use social media to promote the event? All vegan or just vegetarian catering? Paid organizers or all volunteers? Are organizations x, y, and z really degrowth-y enough? Can we plead against flying to the conference or is this exclusionary towards those travelling longer distances, such as would-be attendees from the Global South? Thus, organizing a degrowth conference is not just a practical exercise. Importantly – and we should have realized this sooner – it is also a manifestation of ideas.

Vital ideas have also been manifest through a rainbow of actions and alliances mobilized to deliver groceries and medicines, help others to manage welfare benefits, telephone isolated community members. Actors deciding whether and how to carry out these beautiful acts face their own questions, including risks of contagion. For Benjamin Duke (2020), the confluence of these initiatives creates fertile ground for the emergence of alliances unthinkable before the pandemic. When the difficult journey of reconstruction begins, this resurgent dynamism will be vital for establishing more enduring commons for care and provisioning.

## **Feminisms draw attention to diversely positioned contributions and vulnerabilities**

The coronavirus pandemic provokes us to think about our worlds in new ways. We hope it becomes clearer that, without essential workers, none of us can thrive. That, unless vulnerable community members are protected, even the most privileged are not safe from contagion.

Contributions to essential care and provisioning, as well as vulnerabilities to harm, are organized through economic systems, kinship systems, and other social institutions that foster greater hierarchy, or greater equity, in different historical periods and contexts. Amid experiences of COVID-19 and ensuing economic troubles, degrowth feminisms call for heightened attention to differentiated distribution of burdens and vulnerabilities, particularly those associated with gender.

Data from countries around the world show that [COVID infections tend to be much more severe and deadly in men than in women](#), with death tolls as much as [2.2 times greater for men](#). This intersects with [disproportionate burden of illness and death among racial and ethnic minority groups](#). In many contexts, then, it is non-white men who are most vulnerable to suffer critical illness and death from coronavirus, while differently positioned women are facing different challenges and vulnerabilities.

Growing gaps by which women, on average, [outlive men in every country](#) by as many as 14 years are driven by structural forces, including the gendered organization of military, occupational, and incarceration systems, as well as lifestyle expectations connected to certain masculine identities, including meat-heavy diets, alcohol and tobacco consumption, disdain for healthcare, limited social connections, and risk-taking. Amid COVID-19, research has found that men in some contexts are as twice as likely as women to go [without masks](#) and to [break quarantine](#).

Is it useful to blame men victims for getting sick? Feminists have struggled to motivate compassion for women whose conditions constrain the development of self-confidence, initiative, and financial skills necessary to make dignified lives for themselves. Transition to care-full worlds will also require compassion for boys and men whose conditions push them to demonstrate their virility by performing dangerous labor in hazardous conditions, by exercising and enduring violence, and by taking risks with their health and their lives.

While some people shelter at home, others must choose between jobs that expose them to the coronavirus and unemployment without adequate safety nets. Much attention has been drawn to vulnerabilities of nurses, health aids, and caretakers, in majority women. More gender awareness is needed for millions of men performing essential jobs as sanitation workers, meat packers, food harvesters, truck and bus drivers. While absolutely vital for public health, these occupations were already among the most dangerous and deadly before adding exposure to coronavirus. Around the world they are performed overwhelmingly by men, in patterns of workplace violence so highly gendered that, in countries like USA, ten

men die of occupational accidents for each woman ([US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019](#)). The added exposure to virus can be the spark needed for degrowth and feminist mobilization against gendered traditions of workplace violence that are harming men.

While some people find comfort at home, others face conflict and crowding, or lack homes altogether. Reports from diverse countries indicate that domestic violence has intensified during lock-downs, impacting women disproportionately ([Taub 2020](#)). People who don't even live in homes face different kinds of vulnerabilities. In most countries, women outnumber men among residents in long-term care centers, while men make up majorities as high as 90% in prisons, jails, migrant labor camps, homeless shelters, immigrant detention centers, and military barracks, all of which have become hotspots for the virus. In these residential patterns too, the forms of violence and discrimination borne by those who embody subordinate masculinities manifest intersections of gender, racial, and class inequalities.

Other relevant intersections involve sexuality. Many public health messages reinforce the widespread—and incorrect—assumption that contemporary populations live mostly in heteronormative nuclear households. “Stay home with your family,” “balance extra domestic responsibilities between husband and wife” are relevant for a portion of the population, for example, the 20% of US households that consists of nuclear families ([US Census Bureau 2013](#)). However, equating residential units with normative kinship units limits support for the actual residential and kin arrangements through which provisioning and care are organized in today's societies. Inaccurate assumptions that all people live like the Flintstones, the Simpsons, or the Jetsons seriously limit public health efforts by obscuring empirical realities, which are plural. Those public messages also operate to demean other ways of living and to stifle pluriversal creativity.

Across wealthy countries, the most common household category is a single person living alone ([27% US and Canadian households](#), [40% of Swedish households](#)). Amid isolating conditions, one creative response to needs for care and conviviality is found in [queer dance parties](#) organized online with scopes ranging from local communities to celebrity-filled global gatherings. Dancing together—even virtually—not only provides care and acknowledgement needed in quarantine (and other forms of isolation), it can also build values and pleasures outside the realm of economic competition and gain. Alliances with LGBTQ and related social movements help us to honor the diverse identity, household, and kin arrangements that people are already living, and to support innovations provoked by the pandemic, as well as those motivated by desires for positive transformation.

Equitable and sustainable transitions depend on collaborative abilities to develop gender systems that honor diverse contributions and sacrifices, and that minimize vulnerabilities for all. FaDA has raised awareness of this challenge by hosting participatory workshops at the Budapest, Malmö, and Mexico City world degrowth conferences, and by organizing sessions to share

research findings on feminisms, masculinities, and degrowth. In their article “[Feminism\(s\) and Degrowth: A Midsummer Night’s Dream](#)” Corinna Dengler, Camila Rolando Mazzuca and Renda Belmalle summarize conference conversations:

FaDA members were eager to emphasize that FaDA must not become one of the many streams within degrowth. It is of the uttermost importance to understand gender relations as cross-cutting theme that fundamentally has a say in how we conceptualize the transformation towards a socially just and ecologically sound degrowth society. The pervasiveness of unequal gender relations in the capitalist system is so historically grounded that it requires a constant and in-depth attention for its deconstruction in all degrowth-related topics.

Although it is equally true that the anti-black racism and exploitation pervasive in capitalist systems requires constant and in-depth attention in all degrowth-related topics, that struggle has been less visible and less organized in degrowth activism overall. In initiatives like those discussed here, we face important work of developing stronger understandings and more explicit actions against racism. Building needed alliances with actors and movements working against racism will be essential for futures of degrowth feminisms.

In mainstream environmentalism, white men have dominated organizational leadership, science, and media. Even within climate action movements, students and grassroots members experience currents of racialization, patriarchy, and coloniality that make it difficult to work together equitably ([Chan and Curnow 2017](#)). In contrast, grassroots environmental and social justice movements in low-income and wealthy countries alike have frequently been inspired, led, and publicly represented by actors who are not men, not white, or not wealthy. Not incidentally, they have advanced more radical proposals, such as Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1967 call for a guaranteed basic income to abolish poverty and decrease inequality, or the Zapatista’s demand for autonomous spaces to create a future outside of Mexico’s national development. In order to learn from and build alliances with diversely positioned social-environmental justice movements, degrowth advocates must prioritize mutual and respectful dialogue among diverse ways of knowing and being.

In one study designed to highlight diverse experiences and adaptations in Georgia, USA, FaDA member Lisa Gezon and Deirdre Haywood-Rouse are collaborating with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), League of Women Voters, and Latinos United of Carroll County to document a variety of experiences and cultural interpretations of COVID-19. Via online surveys and phone interviews, they have gathered testimonies from people from diverse social status, gender, and ethnoracial positions, and plan to reconnect with many of these six months later to document adaptations to the pandemic and its consequences.



## **Politics of care**

It is good to hear scientific, political, and moral authorities praise people who stay home to protect community health and those who sacrifice to perform essential work. Some have even suggested that caring for people's health and wellbeing should come before profit. But we must not be seduced into believing that such sentiments will automatically lead to structural change. Rebuilding societies around care will require constant material struggles.

While respect for planetary boundaries demands degrowth of the global economy as a whole, some critical features need to be nurtured and developed, namely infrastructures of care. Feminists call for policies that support the regeneration of healthy humans and environments, revaluing home and neighborhood as sites of production and reproduction, and provisioning economies grounded in solidarity across different strengths and vulnerabilities.

In one example of social movement advocacy, the [Global Women's Strike \(GWS\) and Women of Color GWS](#), urge governments to implement Care Incomes to recognize the indispensable role of (re)productive work for life and survival. Care Incomes build on and differ from other basic income proposals by foregrounding social recognition of unpaid and gendered care work that we all perform to sustain the life and wellbeing of households and communities. As advocates develop and debate various ways of operationalizing care income, all seek to foster equity and solidarity by investment of common wealth in people's capacities to take care of ourselves, our kin, and others, as well as our environments ([D'Alisa 2020](#)).

Like the FaDA network, the co-authors of *The Case for Degrowth* not only encourage readers to prioritize care and common effort in community organization and government policies, but practice it themselves, as communicated in the book's acknowledgements:

Writing this book is an act of care. Care for family, friends, and fellow citizens striving to contribute and find meaning in the face of historic challenges. Care for people and places around the world struggling to survive the burdens and damages of growth. And care for each other, as collaborators and co-authors. As in any act of care, our efforts to produce this book ran up against the limits and vulnerabilities of our individual positions – class, gender, disciplinary, cultural, and other.

Nathan Barlow writes poignantly about care and common effort in moments when teams organizing the Vienna 2020 conference were disheartened by challenges of COVID-19.

[W]e face the dual challenge of the practical necessities of organizing an online conference, which is totally new to most of us, and the important care work of looking after each other in this challenging time. Already a few members of the organizing team have stepped back. Some aren't motivated to organize an online conference in the same way that an in-person conference excited them. Others in

the team have voiced the challenges of organizing online, which often leave little space for emotional sharing or the chance to have informal discussions over coffee.

We are doing our best to proactively create the spaces for emotional sharing and caring amongst the organizing team. To highlight the work done by everyone in the team (especially that which may be forgotten in an online conference), and show appreciation for each other's work, which is especially important in a time of crisis when people are going through additional stress or challenges (health, financial, etc.). The ComCare (communications & care) team deserves a special shout-out for their ongoing work in this regard.

Grief over lost dreams needs to be honored. And disappointment acknowledged when hard work invested seems no longer relevant. At the same time, the successful and well-attended virtual conference suggests that, debating about degrowth conference-planning and figuring out how to work in common had provided marvelous training for unexpected scenarios. In Nathan Barlow's words, "it is precisely *because* we have had two long years of organizing together that we were resilient enough to make such a transition."

### **Policies through and beyond pandemic**

The letter "New Roots for the Economy" raises hope that positive impulses among individuals and social movements can be transformed into sustained structural change.

We now have an opportunity to build on the experiences of the Corona crisis: from new forms of cooperation and solidarity that are flourishing, to the widespread appreciation of basic societal services like health and care work, food provisioning and waste removal. The pandemic has also led to government actions unprecedented in modern peacetime, demonstrating what is possible when there is a will to act: the unquestioned reshuffling of budgets, mobilization and redistribution of money, rapid expansion of social security systems and housing for the homeless.

*The Case for Degrowth* shows how principles of caring and inclusive solidarity can guide the establishment of policies and institutions that prioritize human and environmental health: Green New Deals, work-sharing and reduced working hours, universal public services, support of community economies, and care incomes. In response to COVID, and to pressure from activists and movements, governments across the political spectrum have begun to consider and selectively adopt versions of the radical proposals advanced in this book. In Europe and North America, public and private employers have reduced working hours and implemented work-sharing; different forms of basic income are being debated; financial measures have been instituted to subsidize workers during quarantine and after businesses close; an international campaign for care

income has been launched; governments have engaged the productive apparatus to secure vital supplies and services; and moratoriums are being considered or imposed on rent, mortgage, and debt payments.

On April 14, 2020, the Hawaii Department of Human Services' State Commission on the Status of Women delivered to Hawaii legislators a *Feminist Plan for COVID-Era Economic Recovery*, conveying concrete policy recommendations for a new kind of economy ([Dolan 2020](#)). Rather than reinstate a status quo riddled with inequality, the document recognizes the current crisis as the “moment to build a system that is capable of delivering gender equality.” It calls for a universal basic income; free, publicly provided child-care for essential workers; the creation of public emergency funds available for high-risk groups; enhanced health care for women and LGBTQIA+ people; and reinvestment in midwifery services to improve maternal health care. The plan also insists that 20 percent of the state's COVID-19-response funds go directly to Native Hawaiian communities.

Most states and countries have more than enough resources to cover public health and basic needs during crises, and can certainly weather declines in non-essential parts of the economy by reallocating work and resources to essential ones. Yet, because current economic systems are organized around constant circulation, any decline in market activity threatens systemic collapse, provoking generalized unemployment and impoverishment. It doesn't have to be this way. To be more resilient to future crises—pandemic, climatic, financial, or political—we must (re)build systems in which interruptions in market activity do not sacrifice livelihoods and lives.

Crises in basic provisioning have raised the pitch of mobilization around the establishment of basic incomes, ranging from feminist care income discussed above to [Pope Francis' proposal for global universal basic wage](#). Degrowth aligns with those basic income proposals that seek to enhance resilience to crises, and simultaneously establish material conditions that liberate individuals from exploitative employment, support transformation away from environmentally-damaging regimes, and move beyond “jobs versus environment” antagonism ([Lawhon and McCreary 2020](#)).

Degrowth seeks to curb ecologically-damaging aspects of current economies. Societies in pandemic struggle to demobilize activities not immediately essential for sustaining life. And feminists fight to reorient societies around the sustenance of human and other life. Today, all coincide in facing the fundamental challenge of managing public health and provisioning without growth during and after COVID-19.

## **Conflict and mobilization**

Bitter struggles have already arisen over which paths to pursue through and after this crisis. Powerful actors will continue pushing to reconstitute the status quo and to shift costs to others. There is real danger that abilities to ally in resistance will be

undermined by politics of fear, xenophobia, and blame; intensified surveillance and control; and isolation that constrains common efforts and political organizing.

Movement toward more equitable and resilient societies that have gentler impacts will require alliances across social movements. Differently positioned actors will need to raise voices, organize, vote, strike, protest non-violently, and mobilize in other ways. We are encouraged by instances in which common senses, practices, and politics of degrowth and feminisms are already being mobilized as people collaborate to provision and live differently. And by the recuperation of old and generation of new modes of (re)production and social organization. We also recognize that journeys through and beyond COVID-19 will involve setbacks, counter-reforms, repressions, readjustments, and unexpected turns.

Collaborators in the four initiatives described here coincide with fundamental messages of the open letter “New Roots for the Economy”: “As long as we have an economic system that is dependent on growth, a recession will be devastating. What the world needs instead is Degrowth – a planned yet adaptive, sustainable, and equitable downscaling of the economy, leading to a future where we can live better with less.” Yet leaders around the world are now focusing on saving growth economies; many have already moved to bail out and re-launch profit-making industries, while media reinforce false antagonisms between economy and public health, between jobs and environment.

Shifting priorities toward human and ecological health and justice will require interconnections among culturally and geographically dispersed movements, such as that proposed by the May 11, 2020 call by Progressive International [To Form a Common Front in Global Struggle for Justice and a Better World](#). The messages generated and circulated in initiatives described here interact with many other necessary contributions. Scholarly analyses have certainly contributed to social change; yet much intellectual work has been limited by historically narrow gender, racial, and class positioning. Seeking different paths, the collaborative initiatives described here emerged and developed via dialogue across differences, and explicitly seek to broaden epistemological and social horizons. They also strive to transcend divide between theory and action. These social movement journeys of thinking, debating, and organizing together, while caring for each other, are outcomes in themselves. As degrowth and feminist participants, practices, and relationships are changed in the process, they produce tangible changes in the world.

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## About the author

Susan Paulson, based at the University of Florida, studies and teaches about gender, class, and ethnoracial systems interacting with bodies and environments. She has researched and taught in Latin America for 30 years, 15 of those living in South America among low-income, low-impact communities. Recent writing includes [Degrowth: culture, power and change](#), and [Pluriversal learning: Pathways toward a world of many worlds](#).