



## The Ecopolitics Podcast – Episode 2.11: Growth, Degrowth, Agrowth (TRANSCRIPT)

<https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca/episode-2-11-growth-degrowth-agrowth/>

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*INTRO: What is the relationship between economic growth and the environment? What is 'green growth' and why does the degrowth movement oppose it? And what does it mean to be agnostic about growth in the context of sustainability? In this episode we speak with two scholars who approach these questions from a degrowth perspective - Dr. Susan Paulson from the University of Florida, and Dr. Bengi Akbulut, from Concordia University in Canada. The episode also delves into Global South perspectives on the growth-environment debate.*

[00:00:00] **Bengi Akbulut:** Economic growth historically has been based on both kind of injustices - it's been colonial, it's been based on the plunder impact of resources and human bodies, but it also perpetuates injustices globally. So there's no degrowth without addressing injustices.

[00:00:24] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Hello and welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast, season two, Global Ecopolitics. This is a podcast for university students tackling some of the big questions in the field of global environmental politics. I'm Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa, co-host of the show along with Peter Andr ee from Carleton University, although he won't be joining us for this episode.

[00:00:47] And I am very excited for today's episode. Today we'll be speaking about the growth environment relationship, or perhaps better known as the growth environment debate. You would think that this is a settled affair. You'd think there would be scientific consensus on the relationship between, say the size of a nation's economy and environmental wellbeing. And yet the exact nature of this relationship is the subject of very heated debate, particularly within academe. We're wondering today, how has this come to be? What are the various sides of this debate? What role does economic growth play in the global environment? And can it be mobilized to support genuine sustainability or do we need to find ways of living without economic growth?

[00:01:36] To help guide us through this theme, we have two experts in the field, Susan Paulson, Professor of Latin American studies at the University of Florida, and Bengi Akbulut, who is an Assistant Professor in geography, planning, and environment at Concordia University.

[00:01:52] My first question is going to be for you, Susan. I mentioned at the outset that there is a growth environment debate, I'm wondering where you would place the origins of this debate?

[00:02:04] **Susan Paulson:** Great question. Let me start by distinguishing material growth from economic growth. So we think about material growth as increase in the quantity of matter and energy transformed by human societies, that's trees cut down, coal burned, plants eaten - material growth is calculated by thermodynamic measures. Economic growth refers to monetary value of goods and services exchange in a given market - we measure economic growth with something like gross domestic product, GDP.

[00:02:33] In today's world, there's a very broad consensus that ongoing material growth is damaging the environment and must be halted in order to sustain our systems, to allow human societies to thrive and even survive. In contrast economic growth continues to be widely embraced as beneficial, even necessary - and that's the trouble. Because to date, material and economic growth have been intimately married, deeply inseparable, right? And so we think one is great and the other is bad. How do we separate them? That's the growth environment debate.

[00:03:07] There's actually two problems involved. First is that, as you mentioned, growing economies use more resources and cause more environmental degradation, but there's another problem is that mechanisms of growth require exploitation on equal exchange, which creates inequality. Much of the 20th century has been about addressing challenges of inequality and poverty through experiments with what we call 'inclusive growth' - figuring out how to grow and not exclude and hurt some people.

[00:03:37] And so there's been some notable successes in communist, socialist, and capitalist societies, however, most reverted back to growing inequality starting in the 1980s. With this inclusive growth in limbo, 21st century is becoming a scramble towards green growth, which is a kind of hypothetical future system in which we imagine that GDPs will still grow while use of material and energy will decrease. Anyway, people are fantasizing about that option.

[00:04:12] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** So I'm hearing a couple possible points of origin, but I think ultimately your linking this to some of the debates about how to make growth more inclusive, which occurred in the 20th century. Bengi where would you place the origins of this debate?

[00:04:28] **Bengi Akbulut:** It's hard to follow Susan on her very, I think kind of concise and coherence of explanation. I think the origins are in kind of growth, also equated to developments and growth also being equated to sustain increase in human wellbeing, and it's always been a contested idea, as Susan has said.

[00:04:50] The growth that we've seen and we have been seeing also recently, is capitalist growth, that has a very particular historical trajectory and it's been based on unequal exchange and it's been based on exploitation of both humans and non-humans, it's been based on colonialism.

[00:05:09] So I think there's that kind of contestation for the idea of growth and its equation to human betterment that's always been a part of the history of capitalist growth. But we see this idea of whether growth could be sustainable, especially ecologically, coming up in different guises throughout the history of capitalism, but also throughout the history of economics, for instance, as a social science.

[00:05:36] So for instance, the idea of environmental Kuznets curve, which has been used to justify and to claim that growth can be sustainable and even if you don't see that kind of economic growth as sustainability right now, just keep growing and it's going to become environmentally sustainable at some point.

[00:05:58] So new technologies also have resource requirements, they also have biophysical implications on all of us. And what makes it even worse is that these resource requirements or biophysical implications have always been unequally distributed. The unsustainability of growth, even if it's through new technologies or renewable energy, it is likely to fall on to the global South, it is likely to fall onto the marginalized sections of our societies who have already shouldered the burden of growth so far.

[00:06:34] So what is sustainable or whether or not growth is seen to be sustainable is very much tied to which costs, which ecological and social costs of growth are we making visible or can be made visible. And that's ultimately a question of politics, it's ultimately a question of power relations - which costs of growth have we seen so far, have been made visible, have been struggled against so far.

[00:07:01] And what do we define as costs of growth that we find sustainable or unsustainable? And it can make us clean up our mess better. So that with technological innovation, we will find ways to produce things better, to produce things more cleanly, and they will find also ways to clean up our pollution or reproduce and regenerate ecosystems, for instance. That's sometimes known as the idea of 'decoupling', so this idea that growing GDP, growing economic output, can be de-linked or can continue without an equal rate of increase in the material and energy that economy uses. So basically we can grow without using so much of materials and energy.

[00:07:50] So the role of technology basically is what the contemporary kind of disagreements on the sustainability of growth centers and we have the techno-optimists or green growthers who say, 'Hey, we can do this better in the future and on top of that we need growth, we need a growing GDP in order to feel technological innovation'. So that's another key assumption, that we cannot actually find better ways of doing it without growing.

[00:08:21] On the other side, we have the critics of green growth or for instance, degrowth who criticizes this assumption, this techno-optimism - sometimes called techno-optimism, sometimes called ecomodernization - saying that, 'Hey, wait. There are many reasons to be skeptical of being so optimistic of what technology can do for us'.

[00:08:42] There are different reasons to be skeptical. One of them known as the Jevons paradox, or sometimes known as the 'rebound effects', which basically says that we can

become, we can find or discover more eco-efficient ways of producing things. But the adoption of that technology or technique at a larger scale will basically lead to a higher level of resource and energy consumption overall. So this is often traced back to Jevons who was looking at coal fired engines in England and basically what Jevons observed was that as engines were becoming more efficient, so as they were using less coal, as less coal per engine was being used, the technology, that efficient technology, was also becoming a lot more widespread. So overall, the use of coal, although per engine use of coal was decreasing, the aggregate use of coal was increasing.

[00:09:47] So we see that happening in different ways with new technologies all around us as well. New technologies also have resource requirements, they also have biophysical implications on all of us. And what makes it even worse is that these resource requirements or biophysical implications have always been unequally distributed. The unsustainability of growth, even if it's through new technologies or renewable energy, it is likely to fall onto the global South, it is likely to fall onto the marginalized sections of our societies who have already shouldered the burden of growth so far.

[00:10:28] So what is sustainable or whether or not growth is seen to be sustainable, is very much tied to which costs, which ecological and social costs of growth are we making visible or can be made visible. And that's ultimately a question of politics, that's ultimately a question of power relations, which costs of growth have we seen so far, have been made visible, have been struggled against so far. And what do we define as as costs of growth that we find sustainable or unsustainable?

[00:11:02] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Thank you, Bengj, and you raised a number of concepts which you've done a great job of defining, the environmental Kuznets curve, Jevons paradox, ecomodernism, which you equated with techno-optimism as well. And you answered my subsequent questions about what I was hoping to ask about, what exactly is 'decoupling', this idea that's central to this idea of an environmental Kuznets curve.

[00:11:26] I'm gonna ask though because I'm thinking of a talk I attended a couple of weeks with the ambassador of an unnamed Scandinavian country, but the claim was: we have achieved essentially a measure of significant decoupling from not just our sort of domestic emissions and a national scale from economic growth, but we've actually decoupled our impact from the entire consumption-based footprint of the country. In other words, the claim was we have achieved absolute decoupling, at least in a territorial scale and national scale. And that reminded me that we have all kinds of evidence for what we can call decoupling. Again, decoupling of the impact from economic growth and its environmental impact.

[00:12:21] I take your point Bengi that you've given some ideas about why there continues to be skepticism about this concept of decoupling, but I'm wondering if Susan wants to add in there on why the evidence for it, which is presented is not considered sufficient for many people who are critical of green growth?

[00:12:42] **Susan Paulson:** I would love to come in Ryan on this question. You described this discussion of decoupling by a Scandinavian country, certainly some countries, notably a few

Scandinavian countries, have managed to de-link the pace of growth of their GDP from specific indicators, for example, growth of water use, growth of climate change emissions, etcetera. And so what we see are unique separations there. Many countries have also managed to reduce the total global footprint, per extra dollar of GDP.

[00:13:26] Now as Bengi was explaining, as long as things become more efficient in a capitalist, competitive system, that can actually help growth and so economies will continue growing. So even if each extra dollar GDP costs less water or less emissions or less equal footprint overall, as long as you grow, you're going to have some greater contribution. And imagine if you go, nowadays people are going 3% a year, that adds up and it becomes cumulative, so that's a problem.

[00:14:01] I just want to point out you, say there's evidence, there's a very strong publication called 'Decoupling Debunked: Evidence and Arguments Against Green Growth as a Sole Strategy for Sustainability' that was published in 2019 by Climate and Energy of the European Union. And it basically argues that evidence is overwhelmingly clear that there's no empirical evidence supporting the existence of decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressures on anywhere near the scale needed to deal with environmental breakdown and such decoupling appears unlikely or impossible in the future.

[00:14:41] So basically they said yes, attempts to decouple are great, but they also need to be accompanied by attempts to reduce the GDP and the consumption altogether. So we need both basically is the argument, right? So what you're talking about is evidence of unique, 'oh, look, I made one car with less material than we used to', but if we're making twice as many cars as we used, the Jevons paradox thing, it doesn't help us.

[00:15:10] And so you've got to separate the specific examples of increased efficiency that lead to unique decoupling phenomenon to an overall historical impact through the years of whether each country is contributing to more resource use and more emissions in waste, or to less. And I don't think we have any countries less that are in absolute terms, reducing their total use of resources and their emissions. We just haven't seen it - the empirical evidence says no country has done that yet.

[00:15:44] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Thanks, Susan, that's a really comprehensive answer and I'm going to turn to Bengi in a minute for her take, but before I do, apologies Bengi, I want to ask you Susan about degrowth because Bengi did bring up the term and you have written a book called 'The Case for Degrowth', or I should say you co-wrote a book called 'The Case for Degrowth'. So I'm wondering if you can just take us back a little bit, a few steps to just define what the degrowth movement is about?

[00:16:15] **Bengi Akbulut:** Bengi described that there's been debate about ecological degradation and inequality since the emergence of colonial capitalism, since the emergence of fossil fuel industrialization, all kinds of debate and conflict, right? Together with critique of quite ambiguous impacts of technological innovations.

[00:16:34] So that's something that's been going on throughout the rise of industrial capitalism. In the late 20th century, heightened awareness of this, especially acute

awareness of what was happening in the third world, colonized places, prompted the emergence in the North of degrowth movements that said, 'Hey, let's work to make healthy futures in three ways. One, by decreasing the quantity of material and energy used by wealthy economies. Two, by curbing our cultural and personal obsessions with growth. And three, by reorienting values, institutions, and worldviews around care and regeneration of humans and other nature'. Sounds good, huh?

[00:17:22] **Susan Paulson:** You'll be surprised people are so against it. It's a scary idea. Why are we starting to think this way? Obviously climate change has shifted thinking, right? Revealing that high GDP countries are impacting world ecologies, but also post-colonial and decolonial voices and visions have revealed the asymmetrical power relations and relations of knowledge and science that have led to this uneven situation. And really push people from the North that say, 'No, it's not about helping the poor suffering South, it's about cleaning up your own act'.

[00:17:54] So in our new book, 'The Case for Degrowth' we ask how can OECD countries and societies clean up their own act in the sense of establishing environments to support more equitable and sustainable paths to wellbeing for our own people that don't use everyone else's resource and produce a lot of waste that hurts other people?

[00:18:15] Here's just a package of different sort of policies that we explore. Some are green new deals without growth, reduced working hours, guaranteed jobs, universal basic incomes and services, supportive community economies and commons and commoning, and reorganization of public finance. Basically shifting all of these policies away from, how can we grow the GDP to, how can we enhance wellbeing?

[00:18:42] And so that's not so hard and we've been thrilled during COVID to see that governments across the political spectrum are starting to consider and implement some aspects of these new policies. The point is, even the best policies can't sustain the kind of transformation we dream up without really deep social cultural changes, changes that we're struggling with in our own hearts and our own lives and relationships, which is a quite sort of multi-dimensional journey.

[00:19:11] We write about some of these, right? How can I, in my life, change everyday practices, relationships, and design, myth and values that reproduce and accept institutions and social systems in which I'm part of, social and political movements. And I think the final message I really want to give is that for people working in degrowth, no one site or motor of change is privileged.

[00:19:39] It's not, 'Oh my God, we've got to have a revolution and take over the government or we've got to change gender roles'. Each one of us can make positive moves on really different fronts. And we just have this kind of faith in coevolution that those moves, those innovations will interact in unpredictable, often mysterious ways to lead us towards healthier futures. So that's in a nutshell, some ways that I'm thinking about degrowth.

[00:20:05] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** That's a very detailed nutshell, so thank you, Susan. And I know Bengi wants to add in here, and I should note that Bengi has also written a piece on degrowth, which just came out in a journal called Rethinking Marxism. Bengi when you hear Susan define degrowth, what comes to your mind? How would you add to the discussion?

[00:20:26] **Bengi Akbulut:** When Susan defines anything I love it, so it goes without saying. But I think Susan really made it clear that degrowth is not about less, or it is about less, but it is more fundamentally about different. So it's about building, demanding, imagining, and constituting, and enacting a different kind of economy, different kinds of relationships, an economy that serves different purposes and organized differently.

[00:20:58] What I would like to add maybe is that degrowth also is a strike against the power of the idea of growth. So it aims to dethrone the idea of growth, it's automatic equation that's better. In that sense, it's a politics about reclaiming our identities, our beings, our subjectivities, that is outside of this kind of almost automatic imperative that we should be growing. So it's also a call for recovering and rediscovering ourselves as people who are not only consumers or producers or economic subjects, but also citizens and political subjects that can imagine and can mobilize towards things.

[00:21:44] So that's I think that's a strong point that also connects degrowth with other critiques of developments, for instance, that is emerging from, and that has always been around, but especially is very strongly emerging from the global South and from indigenous, for instance, cosmologies of other ideas of living well that is not necessarily equated to having more material wealth or having economic growth.

[00:22:17] The second one, the second kind of maybe theme that I want to highlight about degrowth is the idea of justice. Apart from the very I think misleading equation of degrowth with austerity or drudgery, another equally misleading equation or representation of degrowth is that everyone has to do the same thing or it's going to be unjust or undemocratic justice. The idea of justice, not only kind of justice in the sense of historical injustices that has been associated with the trajectory of capital goals, but justice today as well is very fundamental to degrowth, in my opinion, or my idea of degrowth.

[00:22:59] For instance, Ryan, when we were talking about decoupling and this unnamed Scandinavian country whose growth has been decoupling from certain environmental impacts, mostly coupling studies or measures are focused on production, so it skirts away from consumption activities. Most again, decoupling or most demonstrations of decoupling excludes what is imported into that country, whatever country you're talking about. And the imported of goods might have a very detrimental environmental impact when they were produced in a different country.

[00:23:37] So for instance, if the global North is buying most of its food stuff from the global South, it's basically importing the nature of global South embodied in those food stuff. But if you're doing production-based decoupling study, you wouldn't see these impacts. So degrowth has this idea of kind of both moving towards a more just system within regions, within countries, but also correcting, doing things to correct historical injustices that growth has brought in between global South and North. So there's both kind of this notion of justice



implied in this idea, but also that as Susan also alluded to, there are different trajectories that can happen in degrowth. It doesn't mean that everyone has to degrow in the same way.

[00:24:30] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** That last point Bengi might be a good segue to the next series of questions that I wanted to ask both of you. Because Susan for instance, raised the idea that much of what you were writing about in the book at least, was about OECD societies cleaning up their own act, I think was the framing that you use. So Susan, you are part of a Latin American studies department and you have expertise there and we do often hear criticism about the degrowth movement, that it's a philosophy from those and for those in the global North, which doesn't have this sort of purchase in developing countries.

[00:25:11] So I'm wondering if we can talk about the way that degrowth finds itself or operates within a developing economy context. Can we interpret a role for degrowth in a sustainable development strategy in the global South?

[00:25:27] **Susan Paulson:** Yes, good question. There's a lot of confusion on this front. Let me go back a little bit to the 1970s, the earliest articulations of *décroissance*, among [André] Gorz, [Ivan] Illich, [and Serge] Latouche, they were very clear about the issues of international justice that Bengi mentioned. And there decolonial concerns led to critical divergences from mainstream development thought.

[00:25:54] First of all, heightened awareness of their and all our historical positions at the heart of colonizing growth led people like European and US thinkers to insist that wealthy countries put their own houses in order before intervening to fix the rest of the world on whose backs we grew, as Bengi described. We're bringing not only all of our food, but our wood, or petroleum, or minerals, everything we're getting from their bodies and their landscapes, and yet we're going to go fix them or something.

[00:26:26] Those are the questions at the very roots of degrowth. Today, in our book, we criticize these kinds of trickle down and charity discourses that make it seem as if growth of wealthy countries and economies helps the global South. We're giving them jobs, right? And instead we argue high income countries, like my own, like US would be better off to focus on repaying our ecological debts and reversing the unequal flows of capital, but also of resources and waste.

[00:26:56] Anyway, so for my collaboratives and myself, we think about degrowth as aiming to reduce the global impacts of wealthy societies, to allow others more autonomy to apply their own resources for their own visions, to pursue their own visions of wellbeing.

[00:27:13] As you mentioned Ryan, many people don't hear that. They assume that our goal is to impose one model of degrowth on the whole world. Now, I can understand that assumption because we've all lived our entire lives in a world obsessed with imposing growth on everybody, from Bretton Woods to the World Trade Organization, it was about universalizing this model. And so people are like, 'They're just now going to universalize a different model'. But every day we're practicing unthinking that, right? Because that kind of assumption leads to preposterous claims that we're going to force austerity and deprivation on the world's poorest communities because those rich ones of us have caused climate



change. And you're right, Ryan mentioned that he hears these sort of indignant people that say, 'People from the global South, they're going to vehemently resist degrowth, that's ridiculous'.

[00:28:05] Anyway, let me tell you, so I've been researching and living in the Andes and Amazon for many decades. I spent 15 years living in communities mostly in the Andes researching environmental management and that's what's actually motivated me to embrace degrowth. Latin Americans who I know desperately want US and Canadian companies to stop expanding their extract adventures, to stop moving with more minds and more petroleum and more agri industries into their bodies and territories.

[00:28:40] They're not welcoming that. In fact, they're using their bodies and their lives to fight against it. And people also want us to stop fueling climate change. People that claim that people in the global South want more growth, I'm not sure they're even talking to them because I'm not hearing a lot of that.

[00:28:58] What we see documented, for example, in the Environmental Justice Atlas, there's now almost 4,000 cases of people living with very low incomes who organized to resist economic development, mining, drilling, logging, ranching, factories, plantations, highways. Also many Latin American thinkers who really push the world to address coloniality, to think about how concepts of the world and ideas and values have created disequilibriums in power hierarchies between North and South. So in conclusion, I'm not saying that people in Latin America are loving the word degrowth. Although we did participate in a wonderful conference recently in Mexico that was called 'Decreciendo Mexico', right? The degrowth organization of Mexico hosted a world conference.

[00:29:45] There are people that embrace the word, but there's many other people who embrace long-standing traditions of a more harmonious, balanced life that's not driven by massive growth. So the way I think about it for myself is that for me, degrowth is for people positioned as colonizers, labeled as developed like myself, to seek paths that I can follow toward broader, healthier global horizons and let other people respect other people to name and shape their own paths.

[00:30:22] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** That's great, Susan, quite a fascinating scan, a brief one, but a scan of the way that this movement and growthism and degrowth are conceptualized in Latin America.

[00:30:34] I want to turn to Bengi because Bengi has geographical expertise in Turkey's political economy and I know she's based here in Canada. So I'm wondering, I think you've written about some of the political difficulties that the degrowth movement has faced in Turkey and I would imagine you would see a similar type of thing happening here in Canada. Can you touch on that? I think I have a quote here from one of your articles writing about the degrowth movement in Turkey and you say that: "Imagining and desiring degrowth would call for a radical reconfiguration of state society relationships". And I think what you're getting at is that this is, for the time being, is not necessarily a politically palatable movement, but correct me if I'm wrong.

[00:31:19] **Bengi Akbulut:** You're not wrong. I was just thinking when Susan was talking, it's such a different context than what is the case in Turkey and I'm from Turkey and a lot of my work and activism and engagement with social and political movements have been mostly in Turkey. That observation that you just caught, it comes also from an experience and lived experience and embodied experience. But what my observation or my perspective on the success or the potential of a degrowth movement in Turkey comes from very much looking at how the state in Turkey has historically made itself visible and justified its existence.

[00:32:00] So I don't want to get too theoretical, but in looking at the state, I use the political thinker Antonio Gramsci's work and very simply, Antonio Gramsci says that states do not - modern nation-states - do not only govern by force, by coercion, but they try to get legitimacy, they try to get consent, they try to get an act of support from the society that they may rule. And Gramsci also says that one way and one fundamental way of doing that is that the states, the nation-state itself, represents itself as a neutral institution that represents the collective interests, the kind of the general interest of the society. And Gramsci was a Marxist and he doesn't believe that there's any kind of collective interest because the society is fragmented, it's always unequal, it's never a homogeneous field. So there's no one interest that represents all of us. But then Gramsci says that the states justify their existence and then get support for their rule by saying, 'Hey, this society needs this, basically, so this is our general collective interest, and I'm going to fulfill that'.

[00:33:17] And by using that idea, I look at Turkey historically and contemporarily, and that kind of general collective interest or the pretense of it has always been economic growth, or more precisely, modernization through economic growth. So that's been an idea that the Turkey state has always justified existence over. Another kind of aspect of this is that it's not only that a ruling class kind of promises or like imposes maybe an idea of economic growth, the idea of economic growth or modernizations for economic growth, historically has shaped the Turkey society as well.

[00:33:59] When you look at political parties and the history of kind of institutional politics in Turkey, every political movement has some idea of how to modernize through economic growth or how to bring about rapid economic growth. So it might be through like state interventionism, it might be through more free market policies, it might be export-oriented or import substituting, but everyone subscribes to some idea. No one questions the necessity of economic growth. So there are no kind of alternatives to growth, but alternatives of growth, like how to do it better.

[00:34:36] And all of the kind of political conflicts around how to ensure kind of economic growth, which way is the best way to ensure economic growth. So when you look at more social movements as well, like there's no real radical challenge to the necessity, to the idea, to the ideology of economic growth because of the way that state society or relationships have been shaped historically.

[00:35:02] One kind of the implication of this, the kind of most politically relevant implications of this is that right now in Turkey and historically in Turkey, questioning the idea of growth has been questioning the state as an unpatriotic endeavor. If you want to question the idea of growth and the necessity, of course, you should be ready to challenge

everything about the state as well. And in that context, it's not a coincidence perhaps to observe that the only kind of social political force that questions lately the necessity of growth and the ideology of growth has been the Kurdish freedom movement who is also questioning the necessity of a nation-state.

[00:35:48] That is where my political pessimism for a degrowth movements in Turkey comes from. So unless what kind of constitutes the basis of state society in relationships, which is very much tied to economic growth, there will be no way for a kind of a strong degrowth alliance movement to emerge and to gain a foothold.

[00:36:14] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Bengi, what you're speaking about there in terms of the domestic politics and Turkey gets me thinking about one area where my students often get hung up, which is around trying to frame the question of green growth and degrowth along a traditional left right political spectrum. And I think maybe you'll agree that this is probably an oversimplification because I know I've seen examples of Marxists who have advocated a type of socialist green growth, and certainly we have examples of eco-socialists and other left thinkers who are in favor of the types of decoupling and ecomodernist or techno-optimist perspectives. So I guess I'm wondering, can you Bengi, touch on how a left leaning degrowth perspective treats some of these questions of politics and moreover, is there a right leaning variant of degrowth, maybe that's where Neo-Malthusianism comes in, but where do you see the left right spectrum on this, or is it just not worth going there?

[00:37:23] **Bengi Akbulut:** I think you're right in pointing out that growth versus critical growth, I will say because for me, degrowth is necessarily left, the way that I understand and define it. And I think Susan's definition and understanding as well is precisely a left one because it's also a critique of exploitation, it's a critique of colonialism, so it's a decolonial, anti-capitalist, feminist degrowth that we are advocating here and I think should be.

[00:37:52] But if we understand degrowth a lot more simplistically in the sense of just self-limitation, it is true and you're very right, that it can be construed as a form of Neo-Malthusianism and that's very detrimental, I think. So I think a kind of a discourse of, let's say contraction, I wouldn't want to call it degrowth, but a contraction limitation is definitely possible from a right-wing standpoint.

[00:38:24] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** So Susan where are you in here in terms of this question of a traditional left right spectrum?

[00:38:31] **Susan Paulson:** Yeah, I think left right is really complicated in terms of growth and degrowth because as Bengi suggested, understanding of generating solidarity to transform for a more equitable world is a movement that has usually taken place on the left. However, today left-wing positions are very against degrowth. For example, labor unions in many fronts are really about getting more cash and more job security for their people, which is construed as pushing economic growth, right? Grow the pie to get our union a better deal. And liberal feminists are about an opportunity to empower women by getting them into the high production world where they can push the glass ceiling and produce and earn just as much as the big earning man. And so we've got people that might be in positions that are considered left political positions, which are quite vehemently advocating for economic

growth to advance their left interests. So for me, it's really confusing and I think we need to do a lot of listening on that front.

[00:39:51] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** So we are running a little bit short on time, so I do want to make sure I get in a question about agrowth because this episode is titled 'Growth, Degrowth, Agrowth' and you've already defined the first two terms. Agrowth, I think it is typically referring to the idea of growth agnosticism and I'm wondering where you see that fitting in, Susan? To a certain extent, I get the sense that some degrowth scholars or some who identify as advocates of degrowth, are in fact agnostic on the question of growth, but perhaps you can share your thoughts on that?

[00:40:29] **Susan Paulson:** That's great. First of all, I say I'm agnostic about economic growth, GDP growth. I'm really concerned about reducing the material and energy used by our societal metabolism every day. I think everyone, every scientist and most activists in the world agree we have to do that. Can we do that with or without - depending on how we manage money and invent money and do different monetary policies that may or may not connect with how much money flows through the markets, that's not particularly my issue. I want to reduce the use of matter and energy, and I want to enhance equitable wellbeing for humans and other nature.

[00:41:11] If we can do that with or without more flow of cash, so be it, that's not so much a question I have. Which actually leads me into just a concluding point that you had mentioned before in our conversation that you wanted to touch on Green New Deal, because I think that is actually the core of this Green New Deal to date. There's actually a lot of positive political action happening; governments in Iceland, Scotland, New Zealand have publicly pledged that future policies will prioritize rather than economic growth. We got the IPCC saying, 'Everyone needs to decrease their emissions so that we can manage our shared atmosphere'.

[00:41:49] So these different things are leading up to an idea that's percolating around the world that we can rethink the eco-social business together, and that's what the idea of Green New Deal is about. And one thing I'm seeing is that it connects with left and right, for example, in Europe, there's a quite right-wing pro-market thing called the European Green Deal, which is about investing to produce a whole bunch more windmills and electric cars and stuff like that.

[00:42:21] And then there's something called the Green New Deal for Europe, which for example, one of the 10 pillars is called Ending the Dogma of Endless Growth - it's a much more transformative position. And in Latin America also there's several, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has this big push which is also invest in green technologies. But then there's Pacto Ecosocial del Sur, which is really this kind of ethnic, gender, and nature equity movement to create more wholesome worlds.

[00:42:54] And so there's these really different movements percolating under this banner of Green New Deal. And I think what we're dealing with in the US is a compromise that I'm willing to be open for, which again it's between left and right, between agnostics of producing more cash and more GDP flow because that happens to be an element in our US

Green New Deal, but the way it's drafted also promotes integral moves towards more sustainable and just socio ecosystems.

[00:43:26] And so I can't throw the baby out with the bath water - I don't want to just because it mentions that we're also going to try to generate more cash with this baby. And so that's one place where my agnosticism about GDP growth can fit in, even though I'm not at all like agnostic, I am totally committed to reducing the matter and energy that's produced by global systems. So that's a little bit on the front of this really valuable conversations emerging under the banner of Green New Deals around the world.

[00:43:58] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Susan, that's a really useful clarification regarding what types of growth some in the degrowth movement are actually agnostic about and which kinds they are more fundamentally concerned about. And you brought in the Green New Deal without growth, and I was worried we wouldn't have time for that but you fit it in. So I'm going to turn to Bengi for a final question along these lines. Are you optimistic for the possibilities of a Green New Deal without growth, particularly in the context of our present situation, getting out of this post-COVID recovery?

[00:44:30] **Bengi Akbulut:** I guess I'm always optimistic. I wouldn't be doing any kind of activism, no one would be doing any kind of activism if there wasn't any optimism. As everything else, it depends on the combination of social forces that could be mobilized for a Green New Deal without growth and Susan mentioned a few ways that we could imagine it.

[00:44:51] I think especially about COVID-19, a lot of debate was pushed out into the open about essential work and essential workers and how essential place they hold in our societies. So that combined with this renewed interest, for instance, in universal basic income. I think it's changing or at least airing some ideas that are becoming a lot more commonsensical right now that could be used to push for a Green New Deal without growth.

[00:45:25] And from that I understand a Green New Deal that doesn't necessarily want to create more to share more, but basically while they're creating more jobs, for instance, pushes for sharing the existing jobs more equitably or rather than creating more GDP, pushing for a way to share what is already here more equitably.

[00:45:49] And so why I'm optimistic now is first, I think there's some ideas that are becoming a lot more commonsensical right now in the post-COVID situation that could be used to push for such a Green New Deal. The second one I think is the kind of decolonial and indigenous critics of Green New Deal that are emerging for instance, from Red Nation or from indigenous groups in, for instance, in Canada that are very much also out in the open how colonial and unjust growth has been and demanding and kind of also airing different ideas than those that are found in the kind of mobile mainstream idea of a Green New Deal. Why I'm optimistic is because of kind of the I think the decolonial engagements with the Green New Deal that is engaging with this idea is not throwing the water basically, the bath water. And also I think COVID-19, although it has it has been very destructive on many communities, I think it has also given us some leverage to push with.

[00:46:59] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** I'm glad you ended on that optimistic note or at least partially optimistic note as many of our episodes in this second season of the podcast have, but we have to leave it there unfortunately as we're out of time, but I do want to thank you guys both very much, this has been a really enlightening discussion. I won't try and summarize it because it's been way too nuanced and I wouldn't do it justice, but I do thank our two guests again, Bengi Akbulut and Susan Paulson. Thank you for joining us.

[00:47:26] **Bengi Akbulut:** Thank you for having us. It's been a pleasure.

[00:47:29] **Susan Paulson:** It's been a pleasure to talk with you.

[00:47:31] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** It's been great to have you and a reminder, the podcast is made available under a Creative Commons License 2.0, please share it widely, we just ask that you provide appropriate attribution. And please follow us on Twitter @EcoPoliticsP, that's ecopolitics with a capital 'P', and get in touch, our website is @ecopoliticspodcast.ca.

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