

PART I

Spanish Culture
and Postgrowth Economics

CHAPTER ONE

Towards an Ecocritical Approach to the Spanish Neoliberal Crisis

The greatest challenge we face is a philosophical one:
understanding that this civilization is already dead.

—Roy Scranton¹

1.1. Cultural Responses to the Spanish Neoliberal Crisis and the Global Ecocritical Turn

On May 15, 2011, a number of protesters assembled improvised camps in symbolic central public spaces in many Spanish cities. This was the beginning of the 15-M (also known as the *indignados*), a massive, decentralized, and nonhierarchical social movement that responded not only to the implementation of socially devastating austerity measures after the global financial crisis, but to several decades of top-down financial and political neoliberalization that has privatized the benefits of economic growth in a few hands and socialized its associated downsides to everyone else.² In Spain, the severity of the global financial crisis and the increase in public debt were aggravated by the real estate bubble that had spurred the rapid economic growth of the previous decade. During the decade prior to the crisis, public and private debt was encouraged by all Spanish administrations in the name of growth. After the crisis, the Spanish economy found itself borrowing more to ‘rescue the banks’ and to pay interest on the debts generated by the previous growth cycle which, in turn, would force the economy to grow faster in the future in order to pay more interest in an infernal spiral of growth and debt. Six years after the 15-M movement, it is

¹ Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 2015), 23.

² For more information on the 15-M movement, see <http://www.movimiento15m.org/>.

time to delve into the emergent Spanish cultural sensibilities that have been gaining visibility and questioning the dominant imaginary of economic growth since that unique historical moment. These new sensibilities are forcing many Spanish literary and cultural scholars to rethink their disciplines. While some cultural critics are discussing relevant issues like multiculturalism, neoliberal biopolitics, socioeconomic degradation, digital culture, and urban processes, the most interesting critical responses reckon with all of these factors holistically and relate them to the root of the crisis: the cultural logic of a socially and environmentally unsustainable growth imaginary.

The most generative interventions targeting the relationship between the economic crisis and Spanish culture are perhaps to be found in three journals' recent special issues: 'La imaginación sostenible: culturas y crisis económica en la España actual', *Hispanic Review* 80, no. 4 (2012); 'Democracia y capitalismo: la función de la cultura', *ALCESXXI* 1 (2013); and 'Spain in Crisis: 15-M and the Culture of Indignation', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1–2 (2014). In the *ALCESXXI* issue, Antonio Gómez L-Quiñones points out that the two most common responses to the economic crisis by Spanish literary and cultural studies are either silence or a politically correct critique of its symptoms that overlooks the central problem: capitalism.³ The guest editor of the *Hispanic Review*'s special issue, Luis Moreno-Caballud, draws attention to the many Spanish *procomún* projects that are currently challenging the individualistic and competitive cultural mode of the dominant market-oriented imaginary.⁴ The double issue of the *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* edited by Bryan Cameron, implicitly correcting the tendency denounced by Gómez L-Quiñones, invites Spanish cultural scholars to investigate the cultural repoliticization of Spain in the wake of the 15-M movement and its challenge to the neoliberal mindset.

All of these contributions (and others), taken together, are opening new avenues of inquiry in the field of contemporary Spanish literary and cultural studies. None, however, engages environmental criticism, and thus a consistent ecocritical approach to Spanish cultural responses to the crisis is still lacking.⁵ Almost completely ignored by Spanish cultural

3 Antonio Gómez L-Quiñones, 'Aviso para navegantes: la crítica del capitalismo y sus im/posibilidades (Notas para un mapa conceptual de la crisis de 2008)', *ALCESXXI* 1 (2013): 69–73; online at <http://alcesxxi.org/revista1/#revista1/page/68-69>.

4 Luis Moreno-Caballud, 'La imaginación sostenible: culturas y crisis económica en la España actual', *Hispanic Review* 80 (2012): 535–555.

5 This lack of ecocritical engagement also applies to the most recent critical interventions, such as *Discursos de la crisis: respuestas de la cultura Española ante nuevos desafíos*, eds. Jochen Mecke, Ralf Junker Jürgen, and Hubert Pöppel (Frankfurt:

studies, some of the most persuasive and sophisticated critiques of the economic unfeasibility, social undesirability, and biophysical impossibility of neoliberal globalization in the past decade have been articulated by the environmental humanities. Ecocriticism in particular has been instrumental in pointing out the cultural implications and nuances of the ongoing social and ecological crises brought about by global capitalism. One of the goals of this book is to mobilize these ecocritical tools in order to study important cultural aspects of the ongoing Spanish neoliberal crisis often overlooked by Spanish cultural studies. *Postgrowth Imaginaries* is a systematic attempt to put Spanish cultural studies into fruitful dialogue with the ongoing ecocritical debate and its ‘international turn’.⁶ Although the majority of ecocriticism produced during the 1990s was Anglo-Saxon and focused on literature, ‘since 2000 ecocriticism has greatly expanded its scope’ both geographically and theoretically.⁷ Especially fruitful has been the convergence of ecocriticism, environmental justice, and postcolonial theory. Ursula Heise points out that

the ecocritical perspective has always distinguished itself by its interest in how the nonhuman interacts with human culture: how ecological conditions shape cultural expression and, conversely, how culture shapes the perception and uses of natural environments; how cultural communities structure and give meaning to humans’ relations with other species; and how risk scenarios, crises, and disasters amplify or reduce sociocultural differences, define community boundaries, and change cultural practices. The question of difference in ecocriticism, in other words, is never purely human. Alterity is always also defined by the nonhuman other.⁸

Serious and sustained attention to the nonhuman can help us better understand the counterhegemonic cultural production that is currently disrupting the dominant culture in Spain.⁹ The fusion of animal studies and postcolonial ecocriticism championed by the critical posthumanism of

Vervuert, 2017) and the double issue of *Romance Quarterly* 64, nos. 3–4 (2017) ‘Culture, Crisis, and Renewal’, ed. Jorge L. Catalá-Carrasco, Manuel de la Fuente, and Pablo Valdivia.

6 Ursula K. Heise, ‘Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism’, *PMLA* 128 (2013): 636–643.

7 Heise, ‘Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism’, 637.

8 Heise, ‘Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism’, 638.

9 See Katarzyna Olga Beilin, *In Search of an Alternative Biopolitics: Anti-Bullfighting, Animality, and the Environment in Contemporary Spain* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015).

Cary Wolfe shows how institutionalized speciesism can legitimate not just the exploitation of animals, but anyone considered non-properly human by the ‘anthropological machine’ theorized by Agamben.¹⁰ Through this posthumanist lens we can grasp not only the ‘connection between the exploitation of animals and colonial oppression’, but also the link between the human/nonhuman divide historically iterated by the anthropological machine and its many justifications for social injustice and inequality.¹¹ It seems that a closer look at the cultural dynamics that normalize the massive exploitation of humanity and the nonhuman is today more critical than ever, for the Anthropocene must come to terms with the widest global gap between rich and poor ever seen.

1.1.1.1. Social and Ecological Context

A bird’s-eye view of the current socioecological situation of Spain can help to explain why the ecocritical approach is so urgent. The explosive socioeconomic situation in Spain is widely acknowledged, and studies dealing with the cultural changes spurred by this situation have proliferated. One of the most comprehensive explorations of culture in the context of the Spanish neoliberal crisis, Moreno-Caballud’s *Cultures of Anyone: Studies on Cultural Democratization in the Spanish Neoliberal Crisis*, begins with an enumeration of social problems:

The Spanish state, 2008–May 2015: unemployment rates approach 25%, and 50% among young people. Eight million living in poverty, according to official figures. The second highest rate of childhood malnutrition in Europe. The highest rise in economic inequality of all states in the OECD. Some 3 million empty homes and about 184 families evicted from their homes every day.¹²

But the ecological situation of Spain and its relation to the cultural dominant imaginary that generates these social problems is only rarely brought to the forefront, when it is not ignored completely. The problem is that, as discussed earlier, ecocriticism has never been consistently embraced by Spanish literary and cultural studies. Significant underground ecological cultures are not lacking in Spain, as I will show later in this chapter, but they have remained invisible to Spanish cultural criticism and have no place in the dominant social imaginary. Fortunately, during the last couple of years a small group of scholars have turned their attention to this gap

10 Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*

11 Heise, ‘Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism’, 640.

12 Moreno-Caballud, *Cultures of Anyone*, 1.

and the focus of cultural criticism is gradually expanding to include the importance of sustaining the social reproduction of life and collective care for vulnerable bodies privatized or ignored by neoliberalism. The best examples are perhaps the collected volume *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates* edited by Kata Beilin and William Viestenz, published in late 2016, and Beilin's *In Search of an Alternative Biopolitics: Anti-Bullfighting, Animality, and the Environment in Contemporary Spain* (2015). Other important critical interventions explore similar issues without fully mobilizing the analytical tools provided by the environmental humanities. For example, Moreno-Caballud's *Cultures of Anyone*, very much influenced by feminist economic theories, demonstrates how neoclassical economics' commitment to the reproduction of impersonal capital results in an unavoidable displacement of the reproduction of life. Two recent works by Germán Labrador Méndez also highlight the bodily nature, material as well as symbolic, of the crisis by tracing the circulation of vulnerable individuals' 'subprime stories' and the circulation of meat proteins and discourses during the crisis.¹³ A recent collection of essays titled *La imaginación hipotecada* opens with four exposés on capitalist economy and its ecological unsustainability.¹⁴ Jo Labanyi and Georgina Dopico Black have recently invited Spanish cultural scholars to 'explore the entanglements of the human with the material' and the nonhuman.¹⁵ And finally, a 2017 special issue of *Letras Hispanas* on 'Contemporary Iberian Ecocriticism and New Materialisms' includes ten essays on the topic.

The alarming fact is that Spain today is one of the most unsustainable countries on Earth, with an ecological footprint that is three and a half times larger than its territorial biocapacity.¹⁶ In other words, the country is both rapidly depleting its own ecological wealth and exploiting the ecological space of other regions, ignoring all the while the ethical and economic implications of its actions. Moreover, Spanish energy dependency on imported fossil fuels is extremely high—one of the highest in the European Union, which already has a geopolitical problem due to its high dependency

13 Germán Labrador Méndez, 'Las vidas *subprime*'; idem, 'The Cannibal Wave: The Cultural Logics of Spain's Temporality of Crisis (Revolution, Biopolitics, Hunger and Memory)', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 15, nos. 1–2 (2014): 241–271.

14 Palmar Álvarez-Blanco and Antonio Gómez L-Quiñones, eds., *La imaginación hipotecada: aportaciones al debate sobre la precariedad del presente* (Madrid: Libros en acción, 2016).

15 Jo Labanyi, 'Doing Things: Emotion, Affect, and Materiality', 223; Georgina Dopico Black, 'The Ban and the Bull: Cultural Studies, Animal Studies, and Spain', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 11, nos. 3–4 (2010): 235–249.

16 Becerra Mayor et al., *Qué hacemos con la literatura*, 10.

on foreign energy sources. In addition, current transportation plans and strategies in Spain, according to a study conducted by Bermejo Gómez de Segura, appear delusional when measured against the global energy crisis in general and Spain's dependence on foreign energy in particular.¹⁷

Under capitalism, economic growth, abundant and cheap energy, and ecological depletion go hand in hand. The reality, recognized by many economists, is that economic stagnation in advanced economies—with the exception of some counterproductive bubbles—has been the norm since the 1970s; the previous impressive growth of 'The Glorious Thirty' was only possible thanks to the availability of cheap and abundant oil (and also uncommodified land). Global fossil fuel peak and other crucial materials and energy peaks are already well known to researchers. Even the techno-optimist International Energy Agency acknowledges these realities in its 2015 report, predicting a global fossil fuel peak by 2020, although the peak of conventional fossil fuel probably began in 2006.¹⁸ In this context, the problem is not simply that the price of importing fossil fuels is expected to rise from now on, but that their supply could be limited by increasing global demand during a time of shrinking oil production—not an encouraging scenario for a net importer of fossil fuels like Spain. Without abundant energy or raw materials to capitalize on, there is no foreseeable economic growth, so lack of growth in Spain is likely to be the norm in the near future. Spain is also one of the 30 countries suffering the greatest hydric stress, ranking second in Europe.¹⁹ Since Francoist times Spain has never properly faced this problem and has only made it worse by attacking its symptoms; the nation's strategy has been limited to constructing dams and transferring water from one region to another within a growth and consumerist model that continually increases demand while wasting water on a vast scale. Because of Spain's geographical position, climate change is already seriously affecting the country and most of its territory is expected to suffer from moderate to severe droughts in the near future, causing massive fires, crop failures, water shortages, and massive desertification, among other problems.

The future lack of fertile soil, water, and cheap fossil fuels will greatly affect agriculture in Spain. The rapid modernization of agriculture over

17 Roberto Bermejo Gómez de Segura, 'La política de transporte española ante el fin de la era de los combustibles fósiles', in *Economía ecológica: reflexiones y perspectivas*, ed. Santiago Álvarez Cantalapiedra and Óscar Carpintero (Madrid: CBA, 2009), 77-124.

18 International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2016*, www.iea.org.

19 Joaquim Elchacho, 'España, incluida en la lista de países con más problemas de agua del mundo', *La Vanguardia*, September 2, 2015.

the last half-century included the reduction of biodiverse crops in favor of a few intensive and extensive monocrops produced for export. Not only has this shift required the adoption of agro-industrial models that require massive fossil fuel inputs, it has also undermined food sovereignty and communitarian resilience and provoked a massive displacement of people from rural to urban areas. This agrarian transformation began under Franco and continued when Spain adopted European agrarian policies after entering the European Union. The current agro-industrial model favors large corporations that control the food supply and force small and medium-sized farms out of business. This rapid upscaling of agriculture has had staggering cultural and social consequences that have already been analyzed by Spanish literary and cultural scholars, and ecological ones, such as the massive reduction of agrarian biodiversity (we have lost 75 percent of it in the last few decades), the acceleration of soil erosion, the creation of a food system dependent on huge amounts of irrigation and fossil fuels, and persistent chemical pollution in the soil, water, and air.

Because of its proximity to Africa, Spain will also be disproportionately affected by the ongoing displacement of environmental refugees moving north. The most disturbing fact is that rather than preparing for what seems to be a disruptive socioecological future, the Spanish government is doing the opposite by dismantling existing environmental legislation in an already deficient national environmental legal framework, even as the European Union is pressuring the government to correct the situation. Instead, Spain is implementing laws that are clearly anti-ecological, undermining communitarian socioecological resilience; constructing vast, unnecessary infrastructures completely dependent on fossil fuels; and openly embracing a neoliberal urban model that exacerbates all the aforementioned problems.

Spain is, as I write, one of the European Union countries charged with the greatest number of environmental infractions. Its neoconservative administration (under the Partido Popular) has recently created legal insecurity in relation to renewable energy that incentivizes disinvestment in the sector and undermines ongoing projects. In summer 2013 the Spanish government approved an energy reform that has been loudly rejected by most environmental organizations because it does not support renewable energies but rather benefits large corporations and promotes the continuation of Spanish energy dependency on imported fossil fuels, creating obstacles to energy self-production. The perversity and ridiculousness of this law and its outcomes have also been criticized by international media outlets: 'Storing solar energy in a battery in Spain is more criminal than spilling radioactive waste. That's the implied message

written between the lines of a recently drafted law poised for fast-track approval by the government of Spain'.²⁰ In 2015, Spain increased its reliance on coal for the generation of electricity by 23 percent and reduced its use of renewable energy.²¹ Given the energy situation in Spain and the current state of peak oil and climate change acceleration, these reforms seem to condemn Spaniards to an unsustainable economic, social, and environmental future. Another environmentally retrograde action taken by the government was to discontinue the funding of the Observatorio de la Sostenibilidad en España (OSE), the main institution overseeing the study of Spanish sustainability. As a result, the OSE closed in May 2013 (although it reopened in December 2014). Furthermore, '90 percent of European agricultural GMOs are produced in Spain'.²²

During the liberalization of the Spanish economy (from roughly 1950 to the present), the social metabolism of Spain (the flow of materials and energy mobilized by its economic activity) has changed dramatically, from one based on renewable sources mostly within the limits of its own territorial biocapacity to the unsustainable one described above. Óscar Carpintero completed an exhaustive study on the metabolism of the Spanish economy during the second half of the twentieth century and concluded that Spain rapidly increased its material and energy intensities, importing much more than it exports and rapidly degrading the ecological services of ecosystems within its territory.²³ The Spanish economy is not dematerializing at all—that is, it is not reducing the amount of energy and materials required to grow the economy, as predicted by the environmental Kuznets curve. The Kuznets model suggests that the ecological footprint of postindustrial countries will not continue to grow unchecked but will decrease after reaching a peak. But the Kuznets model does not take into account the impact of postindustrial economies on the ecological spaces of other regions. Advanced economies do not dematerialize, rather they externalize somewhere else the vast environmental degradation resulting from their consumerist lifestyles.

20 Aisha Abdelhamid, 'In Spain, Solar Energy Storage Is Worse than Nuclear Spillage', *PlanetSavet*, June 18, 2015, <http://planetsave.com/2015/06/18/in-spain-solar-energy-storage-is-worse-than-nuclear-spillage/>.

21 Red Eléctrica de España, 'Estadística diaria del sistema eléctrico español peninsular', December 30, 2015, <http://www.ree.es/es/balance-diario/peninsula/2015/12/30>.

22 Katarzyna Beilin and William Viestenz, eds., *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016), xvi.

23 Óscar Carpintero, *El metabolismo de la economía española: recursos naturales y huella ecológica (1955–2000)* (Lanzarote: Fundación César Manrique, 2005).

To understand all the cultural changes in Spain in the last few decades it is necessary to relate them to the material and symbolic changes brought about by these ongoing socioecological transformations. In the context of the Anthropocene, these ecological issues will not only shape future cultural sensibilities in Spain, but they will also condition material, social, and political possibilities within Spanish territory. Ignoring these dangerous trends may seriously undermine the potentialities of our political imagination.

The widely praised Spanish modernization (equated with economic growth, cultural consumerism, and the proliferation of tourist infrastructures and monocrops) is responsible for a massive ecological degradation that will compromise the well-being of Spaniards for centuries. However, this growth was not something that average Spaniards either chose to pursue or truly benefited from. GDP growth under neoliberal policies tends to result in higher rates of criminality and health problems, increased inequality, social erosion and fragmentation, environmental degradation, and, in some cases, a loss of purchasing power by the majority of the local population. Indeed, such was the case in Spain during the years of rapid growth that preceded and exacerbated the financial crisis. Corporate mass media and the majority of the people uncritically celebrated this phenomenon, known internationally as the 'Spanish economic miracle'. However, during those years (1995–2005), the average Spanish salary lost 4 percent of its purchasing power and the environment was depleted on an unprecedented scale.²⁴ Capitalist accumulation did not recede during the ongoing financial crisis, it accelerated. According to *eldiario.es*, 'El número de multimillonarios en España aumenta un 44% desde 2011' [Since 2011 the number of multimillionaires in Spain increased by 44 percent].²⁵ Thus, capital accumulation can continue without economic growth through dispossession and redistribution from labor to capital. But this capitalism without growth becomes more socially and politically unstable.²⁶ This explains the rise of far-right populisms and aggressive nationalisms in Europe.

Capitalist economic expansion is always a story of dispossession, ecological deterioration, social corrosion, and the extermination of cultural and biological diversity somewhere. It is essential that cultural critics

24 Ignacio Escolar, 'La generación estafada', in *Reacciona*, ed. Rosa María Artal (Madrid: Santillana, 2011), 117.

25 *Eldiario.es*, 'El número de multimillonarios en España aumenta un 44% desde 2011', September 10, 2016, http://www.eldiario.es/economia/numero-multi-millonarios-Espana-aumenta_o_557144596.html.

26 Giorgos Kallis, *In Defense of Degrowth: Opinions and Manifestos*, ed. Aaron Vansintjan (Brussels: Uneven Earth Press, 2017), 87–88.

develop the habit of systemically tracking these links in order to make sense of the cultural processes behind them. The problem is that in Spain before the crisis, the downsides of economic growth were not readily visible in corporate media, nor were they fully detected by the academic radars of cultural scholars (often pointed at cultural *objects* rather than systemic *relations* and processes), especially when the dominant cultural imaginary confused growth with progress and elevated both to teleological mandates to achieve a manifest national destiny. Now, in post-2008 Spain, the downsides of neoliberal excesses are more obvious than ever before. The tricky part is to avoid the temptation to think that, before 2008, things were somehow different and that Spaniards should thus channel all their political energy towards demanding a return to the so-called 'welfare state' without changing the rules of the game. Feminist economist Amaia Pérez Orozco compellingly recommends staying away from this counterproductive temptation, not only because the welfare state was a historical and localized exception within the capitalist system, but because the conflict between life reproduction and capital accumulation inherent in capitalism is also present in the welfare state, and hence that system of social reproduction is dependent on the same disastrous growth imaginary.²⁷ In other words, Pérez Orozco rightly points out that the welfare state cannot be universalized (indeed, if all regions of the planet had the ecological footprint of Spain, we would need the ecological resources of several planets) and in fact may not be socially desirable after all, since it never properly dealt with the contradictions of capitalism and its addiction to growth and inequality and the illegitimate origins of wealth accumulated by the so-called '1 percent' (especially in the aftermath of the civil war and the Franco regime). The politics of the welfare state were not really politics as such, since it never questioned or debated its unsustainable model of growth or the socioecological consequences of that model. The great appeal of the welfare state was that it managed to create a fragile illusion of collective (but asymmetrically distributed) prosperity and well-being by hiding or disguising its downsides within its national borders (under a paternalistically subsidized and depoliticized social system dependent on growth), while externalizing to peripheral regions the worst social and ecological impacts of constant economic growth.

It seems to me that in order to overcome all these accumulating socioecological problems, a radical political culture in Spain and beyond must demand nothing less than a postgrowth society that finally comes

²⁷ Amaia Pérez Orozco, *Subversión feminista de la economía: aportes para un debate sobre el conflicto capital-vida* (Madrid: Traficantes de sueños, 2014), 264.

to terms with the iterative historical wrongdoings of the anthropological machine. This entails articulating a revolutionary political ecology that demands a just society with a sustainable metabolism. These two goals—social justice and sustainability—go hand in hand and can only be achieved in conjunction. To create the conditions propitious to such a radical political culture, it is paramount to envision new imaginaries in which humans are not reduced to individual economic actors, societies are not conceived as factories for economic growth, and the natural environment is not artificially separated from—and instrumentalized by—human socioeconomic systems that reduce everything to a resource to be exploited by the growth machine.

1.1.2. Culture of Transition and Culture of Crisis: Historical Iterations of the Growth Imaginary in Spain

Where did the present cultural imaginary come from? The dominant cultural reading of the Spanish transition to democracy, which Guillem Martínez refers to and criticizes as the Culture of Transition (*Cultura de la Transición*, CT), has functioned as a baseline to ingrain and naturalize the imaginary of economic growth in Spain.²⁸ The CT is, more than anything else, the hegemonic culture of growth. Isidro López clearly explains this in his essay ‘*Consensonomics: la ideología económica en la CT*’.²⁹ The CT is nothing but the Spanish version of the cultural hegemony of global capitalism. As such, CT implies the wholehearted acceptance of the cultural values and worldviews of a specific group, neoliberal capitalists, and the organization of Spanish society according to those values. The CT rendered invisible the historical construction of the hegemonic values and normalizes the institutionalized order of things created by them. The term ‘Culture of Transition’ is an invaluable critical addition because, in naming it, we invoke what the hegemony hides: its engineered nature. When we talk about CT, we are able to conceptualize the cultural, intellectual, and symbolic mesh formed by the dominant imaginary that infiltrated every aspect of Spanish reality.

Although the CT was an invisible semiotic regime for many cultural scholars before it was discursively articulated, it has long been the agent of massive socioecological consequences that restrict and direct the limits of the possible, the doable, and the thinkable. Fortunately, since 2011, the

²⁸ Guillem Martínez, ‘El concepto CT’, in *CT o la Cultura de la Transición: crítica a 35 años de cultura española*, ed. Guillem Martínez (Barcelona: Mondadori, 2012), 13–23.

²⁹ Isidro López, ‘*Consensonomics: la ideología económica en la CT*’, in *CT o la Cultura de la Transición: crítica a 35 años de cultura española*, ed. Guillem Martínez (Barcelona: Mondadori, 2012), 77–88.

growing challenge to the CT has revisited and exposed the myths of the grand narrative of the Spanish transition as a long-desired and exemplary path to the country's normalization, modernization, and Europeanization (supposedly consensual and desired by most Spaniards) after the end of the dictatorship. This cultural narrative ignores the connections and continuities between the elites favored by Franco's regime and the economic and financial actors who benefited from the subsequent Spanish neoliberalization that resulted in the financial crisis. It has been proven that this dominant reading of the transition imposed itself over other narratives constructed to make sense of the Spanish transition (obviating the imposed continuity with Franco's economic regime, the extermination of rural cultures, and the forced cultural depolitization orchestrated by elites committed to a global project of neoliberalization), and how it rendered invisible other cultural sensibilities of the time that did not match the preferred cultural narrative. These 'disnarrated'³⁰ cultural modes are heterogeneous and have been identified by several cultural scholars. The most comprehensive and interesting example is arguably Germán Labrador Méndez's recent book *Culpables por la literatura. Imaginación política y contracultura en la transición española (1968–1986)*.³¹ Graham and Labanyi's reclamation of the many potential modernities and Moreno-Caballud's 'arrested modernities' are other, less elaborated, examples.³²

It seems to me that something similar was happening after 2008 in what we could call the 'Culture of Crisis' in Spain. The supposedly consensual grand narrative of the Culture of Crisis was that we all desire and need to get back to the rapid economic growth that made Spain the modern European country it was always destined to be (and elevated it to become the eighth-largest economic power in the world!). This hegemonic reading of the crisis ignores and silences other cultural narratives that are actively challenging the hegemonic Culture of Crisis, especially following the 15-M movement. I intend to push this exploration further by demonstrating the political ecology inherent in these countercultural responses, which is critical to understanding their subversive and transformative potential. The convergence of challenges to the dominant reading of both the Spanish democratic transition (and therefore the institutional system that arises from it) and of the crisis of 2008 contributes to the erosion of the growth

30 Gerald Prince, 'The Disnarrated', *Style* 22 (1988): 1–8.

31 Germán Labrador Méndez, *Culpables por la literatura. Imaginación política y contracultura en la transición española (1968–1986)* (Madrid: Akal, 2017).

32 Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi, 'Culture and Modernity: The Case of Spain', in *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8; Moreno-Caballud, *Cultures of Anyone*, 105–112.

imaginary that is inherently taken for granted by these readings (namely, that the prefabricated consensus in both cases was about the desire of growing without ever asking why and what for). For the CT, democracy means fully immersing ourselves in growth-oriented, competitive, consumerist, European neoliberalism: an optimum transition to democracy is one that facilitates economic growth. On the other hand, for the Culture of Crisis, the current malaise is attributed to the lack of growth, and thus the optimum transition to a (normalized) non-crisis scenario is one that facilitates the return of economic growth.

It is not a coincidence that the Culture of Transition has only been widely challenged at the moment of an economic meltdown; after all, it was never really intended as a political transition to democracy, but as an economic and cultural transition to a post-political growth-oriented system of social reproduction orchestrated by elites. My main concern is that the much-needed critique of the CT that has rapidly cohered over the past few years in Spain still ignores what could be its best theoretical ally in moving beyond the hegemonic imaginary: namely, the biophysical impossibility of the neoliberal project. Of the 17 essays in the collection that popularized the term CT, *CT o la Cultura de la Transición* (2012),³³ not one seriously engages with the ecological crisis. Words such as ‘environment’ or ‘ecological sustainability’ occasionally appear as afterthoughts and are never part of the main discussion. It is reasonable to hope that the counterhegemonic cultural sensibilities emerging in the past few years are the beginnings of more radical cultural transformations that will spread as the dominant imaginary of economic growth and its cultural mutations becomes more and more socially and ecologically difficult to maintain. As cultural critics, we cannot afford to ignore these game-changing processes for they have the potential to radically transform our cultural ecology in the near future.

1.1.3. Post-Development: Towards a Decolonial Spanish Cultural Approach

Unavoidable ecological limits are increasingly difficult to ignore, not only in the Iberian Peninsula, but across the globe. Thus, the alternative postgrowth imaginaries supported and envisioned by some of the cultural productions to be studied in this book should be understood as examples of an ongoing global articulation of decolonial logics and epistemologies that challenge the economic, social, legal, cultural, political, ecological, and epistemological violence fostered by the capitalist project. This diversity

33 Guillem Martínez, ed., *CT o la Cultura de la Transición: crítica a 35 años de cultura española* (Barcelona: Mondadori, 2012).

of alternative logics is part of the 'ecology of knowledges'³⁴ or 'plural landscape of knowledge forms'³⁵ that have been denigrated, subalternized, and silenced by colonial and neocolonial hegemonic powers. Global capitalism destroys not only biodiversity but epistemological diversity as well. As Michel Serres notes, in addition to the hard pollution produced by neoliberal globalization, there is also a soft, semiotic pollution that affects our minds.³⁶ This mental pollution is disseminated globally by corporate media, financial institutions, neoliberal think tanks, political discourses, and intellectual authorities in order to convince people around the Earth that all non-market-oriented, communitarian, and self-sustained ways of thinking and living should be discounted. Although the negative socioenvironmental consequences of this mental pollution are geopolitically asymmetrical, the effects are global, with the global South suffering the biophysical (and psychological) consequences disproportionately. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos explains, 'A vast array of conceptions, theories, arguments ... produced in the West by recognized intellectual figures, were discarded, marginalized or ignored because they did not fit the political objectives of capitalism and colonialism at the roots of Western modernity'.³⁷ And if well-known intellectual figures were discounted, we can only imagine how easily less-recognized individuals and communities were excluded from the meaning-making process, as Moreno-Caballud so compellingly shows regarding the recent cultural history of Spain.³⁸ Both the Culture of Transition and the Culture of Crisis can be understood as Spanish versions of this global historical capitalist project that suppresses cultural and cognitive diversity. This is what Walter Mignolo means when he identifies local histories everywhere as conditioned by the global designs of capitalism and colonialism.³⁹

At present, postcolonial ecocriticism, according to Ursula Heise, 'tends to see local places as traversed and reshaped by transnational vectors of power'.⁴⁰ According to Santos, 'there is no global social justice without

34 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 'A Non-Occidental West? Learned Ignorance and Ecology of Knowledge', *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, nos. 7–8 (2009): 116.

35 Arturo Escobar, 'Development, Violence and the New Imperial Order', *Development* 47, no. 1 (2004): 17.

36 Michel Serres, *Malféasance: Appropriation through Pollution?*, trans. Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 37–89.

37 Santos, 'A Non-Occidental West', 103.

38 Moreno-Caballud, *Cultures of Anyone*.

39 Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

40 Heise, 'Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism', 639.

global cognitive justice', which is why it is so important to recognize and make visible the cultural, aesthetic, and symbolic expressions that challenge the epistemological monologic of the dominant imaginary.⁴¹ Indeed, the 'denial of diversity is a constitutive and persistent feature of colonialism. While the political dimension of colonial intervention has been widely criticized, the burden of the colonial epistemic monoculture is accepted nowadays as a symbol of development and modernity'.⁴² In other words, the obsolete and simplistic view that portrays Spain as a former colonizer with a nostalgic low self-esteem due to its loss of status as a colonial power may have prevented cultural historians from paying closer attention to the colonial dynamic playing out within Spain.⁴³ This is why decolonizing the dominant imaginary is the task not only of neo-colonies and ex-colonies, but of everyone affected by the semiotic pollution of capitalist logic.⁴⁴

The recurrent discourse of a Spain that constantly needs to catch up and modernize to remain at the level of other Western powers is not very different from the process, well researched by postcolonial scholars, of epistemological (and financial) dependency that convinced ex-colonial regions to embrace the reasoning of their oppressors (Euromimesis, internal colonization, neoliberal policies, and free trade agreements), no matter how devastating it proved to be for their cultural self-esteem, food sovereignty, economic independence, social well-being, and ecological health. Spain should apply to itself some of the recent environmental postcolonial theories, such as the critique of development advanced by post-development theorists. Understanding these internal neocolonial processes might allow for a fresh reading of the Spanish historical construction of the dominant imaginary of economic growth. For example, we might interpret the Spanish cultural acceptance of Franco's *desarrollismo* and the subsequent Culture of Transition's neoliberalism not as a debated political choice that never was, but as belonging to a continuing process of internal epistemological colonization linked to the transnational project of global capitalist expansion in which alternative

41 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, ed., *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies* (London: Verso, 2008), xix.

42 Santos, *Another Knowledge Is Possible*, xxxiii.

43 Joseba Gabilondo has rightly insisted for years on the need for postcolonial theory and Iberian studies to converge.

44 Luis I. Prádanos, 'Decolonizing the North, Decolonizing the South: De-growth, Post-development, and their Cultural Representations in Spain and Latin America', in *Transatlantic Landscapes: Environmental Awareness, Literature, and the Arts*, ed. José Manuel Marrero Henríquez (Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá, 2016), 49–70.

political cultures without a growth-oriented scheme were symbolically displaced and materially exterminated. As such, decolonizing the dominant imaginary of economic growth would be the *sine qua non* of any transformative cultural repoliticization, and therefore the appropriate task of cultural studies ‘as a theoretical field still capable of articulating emancipatory projects’.⁴⁵

The concept of post-development as articulated by some Latin American scholars and activists, such as Arturo Escobar, Gustavo Esteva, and Alberto Acosta, reminds us that the idea of development (and underdevelopment) is a Eurocentric construction promoted by neocolonial powers in order to expand their markets to procure cheap raw materials and labor. The model of economic growth that propels colonial ventures has always had huge negative ecological and social impacts on the so-called ‘underdeveloped’ countries as well as on the lower classes of ‘developed’ ones.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the globalization of that economic system is responsible for the ongoing and accelerating decline of most of the living systems of the planet. Global capitalism is, from this standpoint, an ideology founded on the mass destruction of biological and cultural diversity. ‘Developed’ countries are not a model to follow, since they are nothing but energy vampires with disproportionate ecological footprints that squeeze, destroy, and appropriate the ecological space of the planet. They prevent the rest of the biotic community (humanity and the nonhuman) from getting what they need to survive, while simultaneously unbalancing the cycle of nutrients in global ecological systems.⁴⁷ As Gustavo Esteva observed, development means accepting a universal definition of the good life that is both undesirable and unviable.⁴⁸ As such, radical political cultures tend to contest the prefabricated definition of the good life as a function of economic growth and promote the public discussion about what a good life for all would look like on a finite planet.

Post-development theorists are exposing the ways in which the organizations that encourage globalization promote a neoliberal agenda that only benefits a minority of the global population⁴⁹ while harming

45 Bryan Cameron, ‘Spain in Crisis: 15-M and the Culture of Indignation’, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 15, nos. 1–2 (2014): 1–11.

46 Arturo Escobar, *La invención del tercer mundo: construcción y deconstrucción del desarrollo* (Bogotá: Norma, 2006), 397–424.

47 Jason W. Moore, ‘Environmental Crises and the Metabolic Rift in World-Historical Perspective’, *Organization & Environment* 13, no. 2 (2000): 123–157.

48 Gustavo Esteva, ‘Más allá del desarrollo: la buena vida’, *América Latina en movimiento. La agonía de un mito: ¿cómo reformular el ‘desarrollo’?* 445 (June 2009): 3.

49 Esteva, Babones, and Babcicky, *The Future of Development*, 27–48.

the regions they are ‘developing’.⁵⁰ The World Bank, for instance, is one of many nondemocratic institutions that promotes globalization. Its mission statement says (ironically) that its main goal is to reduce poverty by helping ‘underdeveloped countries’ develop. But on most occasions, when the World Bank actively intervenes, the results are extreme environmental destruction, social degradation, precariousness, and enormous debt.⁵¹ Interestingly enough, Southern European countries today are receiving the same neoliberal medicine—structural adjustment programs—from the troika (the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) that was previously prescribed for the global South in the second half of the twentieth century. In all cases, the justification is the need to grow the economy in order to pay the interest on national debt, most of which was incurred without democratic control either in the pursuit of growth or to fix some of its externalities. That is, in order to feed the voracious appetite of a shrinking global North, the global South needs to expand to include Euro-Mediterranean countries. On a finite planet, for the rich to get richer, more and more people need to be impoverished. The majority of the population of Spain, Italy, and Greece are now suffering from similar ‘structural adjustments’ that decades ago condemned many Latin American countries to chronic poverty, violence, and inequality. As Arturo Escobar notes, it is astonishing to observe the developers’ and Eurocentric thinkers’ incapacity to imagine a world without or beyond development.⁵² Using a post-development perspective, it is not difficult to see in contemporary Spain many of the cultural dynamics frequently found in colonized regions (discounting, of course, Spanish-based corporations still extracting ecologically sensitive resources from Latin America or grossly exploiting labor in Asia).

Two aspects of this neocolonial dynamic pointed out by post-development scholars deserve closer attention in relation to the culture of Spain. The first is the dispossession and elimination of common rights and collective knowledge encouraged by Franco’s *desarrollismo* and continued by the neoliberal project of the Culture of Transition, and the second is the imposition of a universal definition of the good life that is neither desirable nor viable. The latter is skillfully examined by Eugenia Afinoguénova in

50 Escobar, *La invención del tercer mundo*, 397–399.

51 Carlo Petrini, *Slow Food Nation: Why our Food Should Be Good, Clean, and Fair*, trans. Clara Furlan and Jonathan Hunt (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 110–113.

52 Arturo Escobar, ‘El “postdesarrollo” como concepto y práctica social’, in *Políticas, ambiente y sociedad en tiempos de globalización*, ed. Daniel Mato (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2005), 30.

relation to the tourist industry emerging during Franco's regime.⁵³ Both of these processes—the exclusion of other logics and the universal definition of the good life—are related to the advance of the hegemonic growth imaginary and its cruel optimism, and are challenged by current alternative cultural sensibilities that are envisioning a postgrowth imaginary and fostering debates about collective rights and the good life that were absent from the CT. Of course, new imaginaries are never really new. Rather, they re-emerge in different fashions from the renewed, reinvented, and redescribed memories and practices of the modernities that were displaced and disnarrated by the dominant story of petromodernity. If we are willing to listen to their whispers—overpowered by the shouted repetition of the fantasies of endless growth—they remind us that, in Bruno Latour's words, 'we have never been modern' in the purely hegemonic sense of the dominant imaginary.⁵⁴ The human exceptionalism that resulted from the human/nonhuman and society/nature hierarchical divisions, which justifies all colonial, capitalist, individualist, patriarchal, anthropocentric, and neoliberal fantasies, is an unsustainable illusion with devastating material consequences. For the longer and more convincingly we maintain it, the more easily and dramatically it collapses, rendering more visible the systemic human dependency on the more-than-human agency that capitalism denies. As Donna Haraway so beautifully notes, 'we have never been human' in an individualistic, independent, and hubristic neoclassical economic way:

I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all ... I am vastly outnumbered by my tiny companions; better put, I become an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates. To be one is always to *become with many*.⁵⁵

53 Eugenia Afinoguénova, 'Tourism and "Quality of Life" at the End of Franco's Dictatorship', in *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates*, ed. Katarzyna Beilin and William Viestenz (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016), 59–87.

54 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

55 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3–4.

1.2. Spanish Ecocriticism and Ecological Economics: A Great Duet

On Saturday March 5, 2011, the Spanish *Boletín Oficial del Estado* published the Law on Sustainable Economy (LES). The second article of the document provides a definition of sustainable economy:

A los efectos de la presente Ley, se entiende por economía sostenible un patrón de crecimiento que concilie el desarrollo económico, social y ambiental en una economía productiva y competitiva, que favorezca el empleo de calidad, la igualdad de oportunidades y la cohesión social, y que garantice el respeto ambiental y el uso racional de los recursos naturales, de forma que permita satisfacer las necesidades de las generaciones presentes sin comprometer las posibilidades de las generaciones futuras para atender sus propias necesidades.

[For the purposes of the present Law, a sustainable economy is to be understood as a pattern of growth that reconciles economic, social, and environmental development in a productive and competitive economy that favors quality employment, equal opportunity, and social cohesion, and that guarantees environmental respect and a rational use of natural resources in a way that permits the satisfaction of the needs of present generations without compromising the means of future generations to fulfill their own needs]⁵⁶

The entire document is an implicit declaration of neoliberal principles that, with some adjustments, were equally embraced by all the major traditional Spanish political parties regardless of their political colors. The document is embedded in the conceptual framework of the dominant imaginary: the economy reigns above social and ecological issues, constant economic growth is taken for granted as the goal of society, and competition and productivity are desirable and inevitable. Interestingly, the word 'ecology' does not appear in a document of 203 pages that is supposed to engage sustainable economic practices (the adjective 'ecological' occurs only five times). If this definition of sustainable economy is analyzed in light of the argument laid out in the introduction to this book, many contradictions become apparent, the most notable being that a law that understands

⁵⁶ 'Ley 2/2011, de 4 de marzo, de Economía Sostenible', Documento BOE-A-2011-4117, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, no. 55, March 5, 2011, p. 25049, <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2011/03/05/pdfs/BOE-A-2011-4117.pdf>.

sustainable economy as a pattern of growth in the context of a competitive and productive economy is anything but sustainable. Even the scarce space devoted to ecological sustainability (and let us remember the obvious: in our biosphere, whatever is not sustained ecologically is not sustainable) targets symptoms, not the systemic roots of unsustainability, and does so by espousing the principles of ecological modernization and the ‘gospel of eco-efficiency’ that dominates Euro-American reformist environmentalism. Even more disappointing, the political party in power as I write (PP) has not honored any of the already shallow environmental goals and strategies included in the law because, according to them, environmental regulations are obstacles to economic growth. In this official document in particular, and for the major Spanish political parties in general, the economic system is not perceived as a subsystem within an ecological system. As such, it is delusional.

The official narrative of the Culture of Crisis in Spain assumes that the crisis is due to a lack of economic growth and therefore will be solved by doing what neoconservative technocrats (or neo-Keynesian experts, according to a more progressive part of the political spectrum) tell us to do in order to get back on the path of growth. It is a post-political perspective that transforms the political issues to be debated by the people into technical issues to be targeted exclusively by experts invariably trained in the growth paradigm. Under the Culture of Crisis, all our emotions and desires, all our symbolic, aesthetic, and political possibilities, are restricted to the growth imaginary, making it difficult to recognize that what we are really facing is the crisis of the model of growth itself.

Although the cultural authority of neoliberal experts has been sharply challenged in Spain following the 15-M movement, as shown by Luis Moreno-Caballud, the disarticulation of the growth imaginary is not often the main focus of collective demands and political activism. The critique of greedy bankers, corrupt politicians, nontransparent institutions, austerity measures, the undemocratic structure of political parties, and so on, is commonly framed without reference to the systemic addiction to economic growth in a consumerist and individualist culture. A refreshing exception is found in a recent manifesto. In July 2014, a group of 258 professionals from Spain, all recognized in their respective academic, socioecological, and cultural fields, wrote, signed, and released a manifesto titled ‘Última llamada: Estamos ante una crisis ... de civilización’ [Last Call: We Are Facing a Crisis ... of Civilization].⁵⁷ The document states that what we are facing is

57 ‘Última llamada (manifiesto): Estamos ante una crisis ... de civilización’, July 2014, <http://ultimallamadamanifiesto.wordpress.com/el-manifiesto/>.

not so much an economic crisis, but a crisis caused by an economic model based on consumerism and economic growth:

Estamos atrapados en la dinámica perversa de una civilización que si no crece no funciona, y si crece destruye las bases naturales que la hacen posible. Nuestra cultura, tecnólatra y mercadólatra, olvida que somos, de raíz, dependientes de los ecosistemas e interdependientes.

[We are trapped by a perverse dynamic of a civilization that does not function if it does not grow, and destroys the natural bases that make it possible if it does grow. Our culture, which worships technology and the market, forgets that we are, at root, dependent on ecosystems and interdependent]

Given the pollution it creates and the amount of material and energy that it consumes, the globalizing consumerist society is not just socially undesirable, but a biophysical impossibility: ‘La sociedad productivista y consumista no puede ser sustentada por el planeta’ [The productivist and consumerist society cannot be sustained by the planet]. The ‘cruel optimism’ which holds that economic growth is the solution to the problems caused by our systemic addiction to economic growth yields results which are counterproductive to humans’ well-being while preventing us from imagining, envisioning, and creating a just and sustainable society. ‘Hoy se acumulan las noticias que indican que la vía del crecimiento es ya un genocidio a cámara lenta’ [Today a great deal of news indicates that the path of economic growth is already a slow-motion genocide]. The manifesto recognizes the necessity of a widespread social transformation and a change in logic to avoid the imminent collapse of civilization. While many people and communities are already working on alternatives, significant obstacles remain, in particular ‘la inercia del modo de vida capitalista y los intereses de los grupos privilegiados’ [the inertia of the capitalist way of life and the interests of privileged groups]. The manifesto ends by warning of the urgent need to create a new society where humans are not slaves to their economic machinery and by stressing that, given the current ecological situation, little time remains to act. A cartoon by El Roto functions as an epilogue, showing the incompatible ends we are pursuing: a man in a suit holding a calculator states, ‘La solución a la crisis es sencillísima: solo hay que consumir más para reactivar la economía, y consumir menos para no cargarnos el planeta’ [The solution to the crisis is really simple: we only have to consume more in order to reactivate the economy, and to consume less so as not to destroy the planet]. The manifesto makes clear the connections between economic growth, superfluous consumerism, social injustice, and

ecological degradation. It was signed by a number of people, including Pablo Iglesias, who are affiliated with Podemos, a political party that emerged out of the activist culture associated with the 15-M movement and gained traction in the last municipal and national elections. Unfortunately, the party appointed two traditional neo-Keynesian economists (Vicenç Navarro and Juan Torres) to draft its economic program as soon as it achieved some electoral success, and a postgrowth discourse is now rarely articulated in the numerous public statements made by Podemos's spokespersons. Many activists in the degrowth movement were disappointed, as they had been counting on Podemos to introduce the topic into the official political debate. Currently only Equo, a small Spanish party with representation in the European Parliament, explicitly embraces a coherent postgrowth discourse.

Even today it is difficult to find a positive reference to degrowth in a Spanish corporate media outlet, where it is frequently associated with a reduction of the GDP and not appreciated as a socioecological movement that points out the biophysical impossibility and social undesirability of our society's addiction to economic growth. Exceptions include a few sympathetic op-eds, such as a short and surprisingly accurate summary of degrowth theory in *ABC*, and two interviews with Serge Latouche published in *El País* in October 2012 and August 2013.⁵⁸ Only a few alternative and independent media outlets, such as *eldiario.es*, *Diagonal*, or *El salmón contracorriente*, have dared to promulgate this perspective. There is an overwhelming asymmetry in the pervasive media presentation of economic growth as an unquestionable social goal, and the public perception of lack of growth as an evil to be avoided at all costs. However, as I will show in this chapter, significant postgrowth cultural sensibilities in Southern European socioecological movements in general, and in recent Iberian nonfiction writings in particular, have proliferated in the past few years. These movements and writings are in tune with the developments of ecological economics.

58 Jorge Villalmanzo, 'Menos es más', *ABC.es*, August 21, 2011, <http://www.abc.es/20110821/comunidad-castillaleon/abcp-menos-20110821.html>; Ferran Bono, 'Es posible vivir mucho mejor con mucho menos: el ideólogo francés del decrecimiento denuncia que se tire comida a la basura', *El País*, October 30, 2012, http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2012/10/30/actualidad/1351621426_032318.html; Joseba Elola, "Hay que trabajar menos horas para trabajar todos": Serge Latouche, el precursor de la teoría del decrecimiento, aboga por una sociedad que produzca menos y consuma menos', *El País*, August 17, 2013, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2013/08/15/actualidad/1376575866_220660.html.

1.2.1. Ecological Economics

Ecological economics is a transdisciplinary field of research that aims to understand economics in its inextricable environmental contexts, recognizing that the economy is a subsystem of the biosphere. The fact is that ‘all of the input to the economy comes from the environment, and all of the wastes produced by it return to the environment’.⁵⁹ For neoclassical economists, however, the economic system is viewed as independent of its biophysical implications and therefore self-sufficient. Ecological economics stems from, among other things, the contributions of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and his writings in bioeconomics, a new approach that incorporates advances in the physical and biological sciences into economics. Once bioeconomics makes visible the obvious, namely, the physical and biological roots of the economic process, it ‘cannot ignore the limitations imposed by the laws of physics: in particular the law of entropy’.⁶⁰ Another pioneer in the formation of the ecological economic field is Kenneth E. Boulding, whose 1967 essay ‘Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth’ invites economists to move beyond the mainstream unsustainable ‘cowboy economy’ that is designed to deplete the environment and expand indefinitely, taking for granted that there is always a new frontier to exploit, to embrace a more sober ‘spaceman economy’ in which we recognize the limits and fragility of the blue planet in which humans and their economic activities are embedded, and organize our economic processes accordingly.⁶¹ Today it is not sufficient to place the material economy within its ecological context; it is also necessary to take into account the financial economy and its dependency on debt-driven growth. In 2010, Peter Victor, author of *Managing without Growth*, and Tim Jackson, author of *Prosperity without Growth*, started working on what they call ‘ecological macroeconomics’, ‘to build a new system dynamics model of national economies encompassing the financial system, the real economy, and the material, energy and waste throughput’.⁶² New economics, ecological economics, feminist economics, steady-state economics, degrowth economics, postgrowth economics,

⁵⁹ Rob Dietz and Dan O’Neill, *Enough Is Enough: Building a Sustainable Economy in a World of Finite Resources* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2013), 17.

⁶⁰ Mauro Bonaiuti, ‘Bioeconomics’, in *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, ed. Giacomo D’Alisa, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis (New York: Routledge, 2015), 26.

⁶¹ Kenneth E. Boulding, ‘Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth’, in *Environmental Quality in a Growing Economy*, ed. H. Jarrett (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 3–14.

⁶² Peter A. Victor, ‘The Kenneth E. Boulding Memorial Award 2014: Ecological Economics: A Personal Journey’, *Ecological Economics* 109 (2015): 98.

circular economics, rethinking economics, economics for the Anthropocene, economics for the common good, and so forth are all different articulations of a rapidly emerging critique of the dominant economic growth paradigm.

The field of ecological economics is strongly represented in Spain. José Manuel Naredo and Joan Martínez-Alier are internationally recognized figures contributing to the discipline.⁶³ The Institut de Ciència i Tecnologia Ambientals (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) and Research & Degrowth Barcelona are a European hub for ecological economic research. The Association of Ecological Economics in Spain, founded in 2006, has almost 50 members as I write. Regarding the dissemination and popularization of concepts derived from ecological economics in Spain and the connections between mainstream economics' addiction to growth and the ecological and economic crises, the contributions of Ramón Fernández Durán,⁶⁴ Óscar Carpintero,⁶⁵ Jorge Riechmann,⁶⁶ Yayo Herrero,⁶⁷ and Carlos Taibo,⁶⁸ among many others, are crucial. The numerous publications under the auspices of *Ecologistas en Acción* are also invaluable in this respect. In Spain, ecological economics and the degrowth movement seem to be partners in a convergent critique of the growth imaginary. Given that many of the people involved in the degrowth movement were also active participants in the 15-M movement, the cultural repolitization of Spain after 2011 is bringing to light some of the concerns of ecological economics which until that moment were not popular outside of small activist or research circles. Prior to that moment, assuming that Kenneth Boulding was correct in his thought-provoking, playful assertion that 'Anyone who believes that exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist', it seems that all Spaniards embracing the dominant imaginary of the CT would fit into one of those two categories.

63 Óscar Carpintero, 'Introducción: la economía ecológica como enfoque abierto y transdisciplinar', in *Economía ecológica: reflexiones y perspectivas*, ed. Santiago Álvarez Cantalapiedra and Óscar Carpintero (Madrid: CBA, 2009), 24.

64 Ramón Fernández Durán, *El antropoceno: la expansión del capitalismo global choca con la biosfera* (Barcelona: Virus editorial, 2011); idem, *Tercera Piel: sociedad de la información y conquista del alma* (Barcelona: Virus editorial, 2010).

65 Carpintero, 'Introducción'; idem, *El metabolismo de la economía española*.

66 Jorge Riechmann, 'Para una teoría de la racionalidad ecológica', in *Economía ecológica: reflexiones y perspectivas*, ed. Santiago Álvarez Cantalapiedra and Óscar Carpintero (Madrid: CBA, 2009), 169–213; idem, *Un mundo vulnerable: ensayos sobre ecología, ética y tecnociencia* (Madrid: Catarata, 2000).

67 Yayo Herrero et al., *Cambiar las gafas para mirar el mundo: una nueva cultura de la sostenibilidad* (Madrid: Libros en acción, 2011).

68 Carlos Taibo, *El decrecimiento explicado con sencillez* (Madrid: Catarata, 2011).

1.2.2. The Proliferation of Iberian Socioecological Essays

In recent years a number of politically engaged Iberian nonfiction writers have adopted a cross-disciplinary perspective to critique the unsustainable social and environmental degradation caused by global capitalism and its energy-devouring regime. These authors—among them Jorge Riechmann, Joan Martínez-Alier, Amaia Pérez Orozco, Ramon Folch, Alicia Puleo, Antonio Turiel, Ramón Fernández Durán, Emilio Santiago Muíño, Joaquín Sempere, Óscar Carpintero, Yayo Herrero, Carles Riba Romeva, Carlos Taibo, Juan del Río, and Esther Vivas—embrace social ecology, ecological economics, and political ecology.⁶⁹ Many of these writers adopt these perspectives in order to challenge and redefine the innocuous ‘reform environmentalism’ that dominates the European Union’s official discourse. Reform environmentalism ‘holds to the mainstream assumption that the natural world be seen primarily as a resource for human beings, whether economically or culturally, but it strives to defend and conserve it against over-exploitation. For the most part reform environmentalists advocate measures within the given terms of capitalist industrial society’.⁷⁰ This ambivalent environmental discourse is highly problematic in many ways: it reduces everything to a resource to be exploited and managed by economic activity reinforcing the growth-oriented rationale; it does not question the inherent unsustainability of capitalism but advocates instead the adoption of a green capitalism; it intends to solve environmental problems without reducing the overall consumption of societies, even though cultural consumerism is a well-known factor in triggering unsustainable behavior; and its preferred strategy to alleviate poverty is sustainable development and green growth, rather than redistribution, which maintains the existing unequal and competitive system of social reproduction. This pragmatic, techno-managerial environmentalism assumes that a few technological fixes within a market economy can allow for more economic growth while protecting the environment. Their assumptions are not only factually wrong, but prevent any meaningful political questions from emerging (issues regarding the unequal distribution of wealth and power, the (un)desirability of growth and capitalism, the

69 Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres*; Pérez Orozco, *Subversión feminista de la economía*; Ramon Folch, *La quimera del crecimiento: la sostenibilidad en la era postindustrial* (Barcelona: RBA, 2011); Alicia H. Puleo, *Ecofeminismo: para otro mundo posible* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2011); Emilio Santiago Muíño, *Rutas sin mapa: horizontes de transición ecosocial* (Madrid: Catarata, 2016); Joaquim Sempere, *Mejor con menos: necesidades, explosión consumista y crisis ecológica* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2009); Carles Riba Romeva, *Recursos energéticos y crisis: el fin de 200 años irrepetibles* (Barcelona: Octaedro, 2012).

70 Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

existing exploitative relations, and the authority of experts) by presenting technical adaptation, not systemic change, as inevitable. Eco-modernists, as some of these techno-managerial reform environmentalists call themselves in their 2015 manifesto, think that using resources more efficiently without changing dominant power relations and values would take care of the environmental problems. They ‘confuse efficiency/intensity with scale. Using existing resources more intensively leads to more, not less, resource use ... This is the historical pattern of capitalism, the one that eco-modernists want to see accelerated’.⁷¹

Because reform environmentalism operates within the framework of the dominant imaginary of economic growth, it is counterproductive and unable to solve the socioecological problems of the Anthropocene. Arran Stibbe rightly points out that, from an ecolinguistic point of view, some pervasive metaphors have negative environmental consequences and are therefore ‘destructive metaphors’. One of them is the ‘frequently used ECONOMIC GROWTH IS A TIDE’, which is often deployed in neoliberal discourses ‘in the form “a rising tide lifts all boats” to represent economic growth as a solution to the problem of poverty alleviation ... The metaphor can be seen as an attempt to distract attention away from the only way to “lift the boats” of the poor within a finite world, which is redistribution’.⁷² Reform environmentalism looks for efficient ways to do more of the same. But we need to do differently, not better. The question eco-modernists should ask themselves remains: Is it really smart to refine, technologically and theoretically, a system that operates by undermining the conditions necessary for our biophysical survival? Is it smart to make a destructive system smarter, more sophisticated, and more efficient? Sustainability for eco-modernists means nothing but sustaining the status quo. For those who support reform environmentalism, the problem is the tool (technology), not the logic. As Stacy Alaimo rightly notes, ‘this technological focus obscures power differentials, political differences, and cultural values’.⁷³ A decolonial environmental humanities would ask, to paraphrase Alaimo, What is it that sustainability seeks to sustain and for whom?⁷⁴ Advocates of degrowth raise this question, aim to repoliticize environmentalism, and argue that the point is not to do better or less within the same pathological game, but to change the rules (the logic).

71 Kallis, *In Defense of Degrowth*, 52.

72 Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics*, 73.

73 Stacy Alaimo, ‘Sustainable This, Sustainable That: New Materialisms, Posthumanism, and Unknown Futures’, *PMLA* 127 (2012): 560.

74 Alaimo, ‘Sustainable This, Sustainable That’, 562.

Generally degrowth challenges the hegemony of growth and calls for a democratically led redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialised countries as a means to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice and well-being. Although integrating bioeconomics and ecological macroeconomics, degrowth is a noneconomic concept. On the one hand, degrowth is the reduction of energy and material throughput, needed in order to face the existing biophysical constraints (in terms of natural resources and ecosystem's [sic] assimilative capacity). On the other, degrowth is an attempt to challenge the omnipresence of market-based relations in society and the growth-based roots of the social imaginary replacing them by the idea of frugal abundance. It is also a call for deeper democracy, applied to issues which lie outside the mainstream democratic domain, like technology. Finally, degrowth implies an equitable redistribution of wealth within and across the Global North and South, as well as between present and future generations.⁷⁵

The Iberian socioenvironmental essayists I introduce here (and others hailing from different areas of the Euro-Mediterranean region) reveal the fallacies within reform environmentalism and identify the problems ingrained in capitalist economic dynamics: epistemological reductionism and economicism, biological annihilation, cultural consumerism, environmental injustice, asymmetrical transnational power relations, lack of systemic thinking, and the disproportionate ecological footprint of some regions. These authors propose and explore socially fair and ecologically sound integral alternatives to the hegemonic cultural imaginary. By analyzing the capitalist economy in terms of material and energetic transformations that accelerate entropy and decrease both biological and epistemological diversity, these authors view cultural consumerism as a suicidal ideology and propose the reduction of our economic throughputs to allow others (both human and nonhuman) to live. By uncovering the anthropocentric, utilitarian, androcentric, neocolonial, and reductionist blind spots of global capitalism, these writings promote a posthumanist and materialist understanding of economy that takes into consideration the agency and interdependency of all forms of life. By rematerializing and posthumanizing the economy, the authors are in line with the 'material turn' that has recently occurred in ecocriticism in particular and the environmental humanities in

⁷⁵ Federico Demaria, Francois Schneider, Filka Sekulova, and Joan Martinez-Alier, 'What is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social Movement', *Environmental Values* 22, no. 2 (2013): 209.

general. They challenge the official discourses that equate economic growth with well-being and social progress, most of which are based on fictitious separations between human and nonhuman, subject and object, observer and observed system, or economy and environment.

In the next few pages, I will follow the path blazed by the Iberian socioenvironmental critics I have mentioned to unmask the unscientific assumptions behind the neoclassical economics that currently dominate both the global cultural imaginary in general and the economic debates within the European Union in particular. I will then analyze the common ground found in the alternatives they have proposed. Finally, I will highlight the connection between the ideas advanced by these authors in Spain and the emergence of a transnational debate in environmental humanities and posthumanism. In this regard, these authors should not be considered in the context of their national framework alone, but as participants in a wider critique of neoliberal globalization from a Euro-Mediterranean perspective. My study of these works of nonfiction confirms Ursula Heise's observation that 'nonfictional genres have assumed a prominence in transnational ecocriticism that they do not have in other types of comparatist research', which 'has over the last few years enabled a transdisciplinary collaboration with environmentally oriented scholars'.⁷⁶

Overall, these Iberian authors prioritize two crucial currents in the discussion. The first is the inseparability of social and environmental problems and the interrelationship between socioenvironmental destruction, the asymmetrical global distribution of wealth and power, and the degradation of political civil society. The great acceleration of economic growth since the 1950s translates not only into a planetary environmental and energy crisis, but also a distribution crisis and, as a result, a crisis of democracy. The greatest difficulty preventing any meaningful communitarian participation in relevant political decisions arises from the ubiquity of the neoliberal economic reductionism. The second current is the ongoing globalization of an unsustainable economic system based on the biophysical impossibility of constant economic growth and, more importantly, the globally imposed anthropocentric, androcentric, reductionist, colonial, and hubristic logic behind such a system. This logic, which presents itself as the only legitimate way of knowing, exacerbates the problems it creates by trying to address them using the same instrumental and reductionist reasoning that generated them in the first place, while preventing any alternative from being envisioned and incorporated. This logic renders any creative solution unthinkable and inconceivable. As such, we are not just facing a social,

76 Heise, 'Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism', 641.

economic, environmental, or political issue, but a more nefarious problem that encompasses all four—a vicious epistemological circle. Alicia Puleo writes that for Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, ‘la Ilustración se había marcado inicialmente por objetivo destruir los mitos y alimentar la imaginación con el saber pero, más tarde, la Razón instrumental se convirtió en un mito que traza nuevos límites al pensamiento’ [The Enlightenment was marked by the desire to destroy myths and feed the imagination with knowledge but, later on, instrumental Reason morphed into a new myth imposing new limits on thought].⁷⁷ Today, that instrumental reason is at the service of the fundamentalism of the market economy, which excludes any solution that is not expressed in terms that champion economic growth and debt-driven financial capital accumulation.

In order to avoid the above-mentioned limitations imposed on thought, the new wave of Iberian socioecological critics employs a systemic and transdisciplinary approach to expose the blind spots in the hegemonic discourse. In that respect, they challenge the modern, arbitrary, and disciplinary epistemological divide that prevents creative thinking outside of its obdurate reasoning, and they adopt instead more appropriate, inclusive, systemic, and holistic frameworks that focus, for instance, on ‘socioecology’,⁷⁸ ‘socioecological metabolism’,⁷⁹ ‘social metabolism’,⁸⁰ ‘ecofeminist degrowth’,⁸¹ ‘ecosocial transition’,⁸² and ‘ecological rationality’.⁸³ All of these frameworks point to the interdependency of social, ecological, and semiotic systems. These approaches are integrated within ecological economics and the degrowth movement to emphasize the inseparability of the human and nonhuman spheres for a proper understanding of pressing global problems. From this vantage point, the economic system is not independent of the system of the biosphere, as perceived by neoclassical economics, nor is the environment a subsystem of the economic system, as it is treated by neoliberalism and its ‘greener’ version, namely, environmental economics. The economic system is nothing but a subsystem embedded in, and dependent on, the system of the biosphere. By necessity, the activity of the economic system, to be sustainable, is restricted by the limits of the

77 Puleo, *Ecofeminismo*, 90.

78 Folch, *La quimera del crecimiento*, 91–92.

79 Sempere, *Mejor con menos*, 164–165.

80 Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres*, 350.

81 Pérez Orozco, *Subversión feminista de la economía*, 223.

82 Santiago Muíño, *Rutas sin mapa*; Fernando Prats, Yayo Herrero, and Alicia Torrego, *La gran encrucijada: sobre la crisis ecosocial y el cambio de ciclo histórico* (Madrid: Ecologistas en acción, 2016).

83 Riechmann, ‘Para una teoría’, 193.

biosphere and must be compatible with the ecological laws that govern its functions. The economic system cannot ignore, for example, the laws of thermodynamics.⁸⁴ Hence an economic system based on constant economic growth, planetary urbanization, and the ever-faster production and consumption of commodities is undesirable, destructive, unendurable, and unrealistic. The constant expansion of this economic activity is radically altering the global environment and transgressing planetary boundaries. This socioecological critique urges us to abandon the dominant social imaginary that separates the economic system and the environment so that we can begin to scientifically and politically analyze the flux of materials and energy mobilized and transformed by capitalist economic activity, and use that information to organize our societies in just and sustainable postgrowth ways.

In the meantime, the global expansion of the current hegemonic economic model results in irreversible ecological degradation. This economic model extracts raw materials and energy and transforms them into toxic waste and pollution at an ever-accelerating pace. The negative social consequences of this environmental degradation disproportionately affect the poorest populations. The response of disenfranchised communities to this environmental injustice has been termed ‘the environmentalism of the poor’⁸⁵ to contrast it with previous, less socially oriented environmental movements that originated in the United States. If observed outside of its own unrealistic and hubristic discourse, neoliberal globalization is an ideology of death, since it globally disrupts the ecological cycle of nutrients and depends on a constant increase of human biomass usage (quantified as the human appropriation of net primary productivity) detrimental to other forms of life and alternative ways of human life. The more social metabolism and human appropriation of net primary productivity increase, the less biodiversity and cultural diversity remain on the planet. In other words, the faster capitalist societies appropriate productive landscape and seascape by expanding the ecological space impacted by their socioeconomic activities (extractivism, urbanization, agroindustry, overfishing, communication and transportation infrastructures, waste disposal and pollution, and so on), the faster other species, as well as non-market economy-oriented cultures, go extinct. Thus, when the global economy grows, the living systems of the planet shrink, and cultural diversity is diminished.

84 Carpintero, ‘Introducción’, 15; Riechmann, ‘Para una teoría de la racionalidad ecológica’, 190.

85 Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martínez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (London: Earthscan, 1997).

When neoclassical and neoliberal economists talk about generating wealth, they are referring to the destruction, depletion, and appropriation of the real wealth generated by ecosystems. ‘La contabilidad económica es por tanto falsa, porque confunde el agotamiento de recursos y el aumento de entropía con la creación de riqueza’ [The economic accounting is therefore false, because it confuses the depletion of resources and the increase in entropy with the creation of wealth].⁸⁶ Unfortunately, this globalizing economic system currently dominates the international political economy (including the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank) and dictates our way of life and social organization: ‘Es una sociedad construida sobre la economía, y una economía construida sobre la negación tenaz de la realidad’ [It is a society constructed upon the economy, and an economy constructed upon the constant denial of reality].⁸⁷ Thus, our mainstream economic system remains blind to the constraints of biophysical reality. The main tenets of this system are anachronistic and obsolete, since they were constructed from the old mechanistic scientific paradigm dominant in the nineteenth century. That paradigm conceives of the world as a machine made of different articulated parts rather than as an integrated dynamic living system; as Óscar Carpintero notes, ‘La ciencia económica tradicional es pretermodinámica, preevolutiva y preecológica’ [The science of traditional economics is pre-thermodynamics, pre-evolutionary, and pre-ecological].⁸⁸ Orthodox economics has ignored the scientific advances of other disciplines during the last century.⁸⁹ In sum, it offers a logic ill-equipped to deal with the global ecological crisis, which is exacerbated precisely by the globalization of its very logic.

Many of the aforementioned Iberian socioecological essayists point out that, in order to maintain the destructive system’s unsustainable model, the previously described hegemonic discourse disseminates a blind faith in modern Western techno-science. Technology and science are presented as the remedy for all our present excesses and abuse. Paradoxically, while this discourse maintains an unwavering faith in science, it ignores or rejects what the vast majority of the scientific community confirms and cherry-picks some decontextualized data. Furthermore, under the current circumstances, technological and scientific research and innovation depend on, and are guided by, corporate funding. Their main motivation is profit, and not necessarily the well-being of communities and ecosystems. Most

86 Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres*, 350.

87 Riechmann, ‘Para una teoría de la racionalidad ecológica’, 190.

88 Riechmann, ‘Para una teoría de la racionalidad ecológica’, 191.

89 Carpintero, ‘Introducción’, 23.

new technologies are created under the industrial logic of faster production. They are designed to accelerate the expansion of social metabolism and to quicken the pace of the extraction of materials and the use of fossil fuel energy. These technologies tend to aggravate ecological problems by raising the level of human biomass usage to ecologically unsustainable proportions. Rather than targeting existing problems, many technological improvements create new, doubtful, necessities and a greater dependency on energy and material consumption. Such is the case of forced mobility, created by the expansion of car use and the resulting dispersed urban model.⁹⁰

Perhaps the most important technological danger, according to many Iberian socioecological critics, is the role of new information and communication technology in making the socioecological global crisis invisible:

La sociedad de la imagen y la información ayuda a ocultar aún más la gravísima crisis ecológica que enfrentamos, sobre todo porque incentiva el desplazamiento de la atención de la biosfera a la infosfera (ciberspacio, realidad virtual), invisibilizando todavía más el deterioro de la Primera Piel, de la Madre Naturaleza.

[The society of image and information helps to hide even more the very serious ecological crisis we face, especially because it encourages a shift in focus from the biosphere to the infosphere (cyberspace, virtual reality), making more invisible still the deterioration of the First Skin, of Mother Nature]⁹¹

The currently celebrated information society is another misleading cruel optimism, and many of these authors prefer to speak of it as a ‘disinformation society’ due to the overabundance of meaningless information.⁹² In truth, while corporate mass media is disseminating and celebrating the notion of the information age, economic globalization is drastically reducing the real information of the Earth—encoded in biological genetic information and cultural diversity—due to the mass extinction of species and cultures that is taking place on a planetary scale.⁹³

In the following pages, I will explore the alternatives suggested by these critiques in order to address the aforementioned issues. According to these thinkers, the two most crucial and urgent changes needed are, first of all,

90 Sempere, *Mejor con menos*, 152.

91 Fernández Durán, *El antropoceno*, 90.

92 Riechmann, *Un mundo vulnerable*, 80.

93 Fernández Durán, *El antropoceno*, 90–92.

a significant reduction of social metabolism on a global scale; and second, a radical cultural change. Because the main objective is to learn how to live well while using less material and energy, we need to rethink what it means to 'live well' by democratically redefining notions such as 'progress' and 'development'. It is important to distinguish vital needs from superfluous or artificial needs. It is urgent to find more ecological and more socially efficient ways to satisfy those needs within each specific socio-natural context. Here the distinction between needs and satisfiers proposed by Chilean economist Manfred A. Max-Neef becomes relevant.⁹⁴ All humans have needs that must be satisfied in order to enjoy a life of dignity, and different societies have different strategies to satisfy such needs (satisfiers). Some satisfiers require more intensive material and energy throughput than others in order to fulfill the same need. According to Max-Neef, there are 'destructive satisfiers' that fulfill a need by compromising the conditions necessary either for fulfilling other needs or for fulfilling that same one in the future; such is the case with industrial agriculture, as Esther Vivas demonstrates.⁹⁵ So-called developed countries or advanced economies are societies with sadly inefficient satisfiers, and as a result they use a disproportionate amount of material and energy per capita to meet their human needs. In doing so, they are robbing the ecological space of other regions and preventing them from maintaining the material and energy required to meet their own needs. With neoliberal globalization imposed all over the world, more and more regions are persuaded or forced to adopt the inefficient satisfier strategies deployed by developed regions. This is a sure path to both ecological collapse and geopolitical conflict. The ultimate challenge is for developed countries to create a postgrowth social metabolism that is able to meet the vital needs of all their citizens by using satisfiers that require less material and energy. Successfully doing so would liberate the unfairly captured ecological space of other regions, so that they could decolonize and develop whatever satisfiers they consider culturally appropriate.

To be holistic and to avoid economic reductionism, the study of human needs must expand beyond superfluous material and energy consumption. It must incorporate emotional, psychological, social, spiritual, and environmental aspects. It requires a posthumanist and systemic conception of health and well-being. This is not an unproblematic task, since vague

94 Manfred A. Max-Neef, *Human Scale Development* (New York: The Apex Press, 1991).

95 Esther Vivas, 'Novedad editorial: 'El negocio de la comida'', *Esther Vivas*, November 6, 2014, <https://esthervivas.com/2014/11/06/novedad-editorial-el-negocio-de-la-comida/>.

concepts such as ‘quality of life’ have been used repeatedly by numerous ideologies and groups in Spain (and elsewhere) during the second half of the twentieth century to justify unsustainable developmental projects and the environmental degradation associated with mass tourism, as pointed out by Eugenia Afinoguénova.⁹⁶ All these ideologies represent different articulations of the same modern Western anthropocentric, growth-oriented logic and none proposes a posthumanist or relational definition of ‘quality of life’. Perhaps the postgrowth approach to socioenvironmental issues supported by the authors I discuss here might foster a better dialogue with indigenous conceptions of ‘living well’, such as the Andean, based on the interdependence and reciprocity of the biotic community (human and nonhuman), because most Euro-American humanist articulations of ‘quality of life’ have never seriously questioned anthropocentrism or consistently incorporated the science of ecology into their theoretical models.

According to Jorge Riechmann, cultural consumerism and economic growth must be replaced by ecological rationality.⁹⁷ This new rationality will focus on the satisfaction of human needs through a sustainable (smaller) social metabolism.⁹⁸ The main goal is not to maximize, but to optimize (to target sufficiency not efficiency).⁹⁹ In order to halt the ongoing global ecological and social degradation, the industrial and postindustrial regions of the planet must begin a socioecological transition towards a permanent reduction in their use/waste of materials and energy.¹⁰⁰ It is a change that will require a cultural shift in dominant values and ways of thinking, as well as the redefinition of humans’ role in the biotic community. It is important to emphasize that ‘todos los seres humanos son interdependientes y ecodependientes, pues el *homo economicus* competitivo e independiente es una absoluta ficción’ [all human beings are interdependent and ecodependent, since the competitive and independent *homo economicus* is a total fiction].¹⁰¹ This cultural shift will call for socially and ecologically sustainable degrowth based on the priority of social life and relational goods (rather than individual material accumulation and consumption); creative and communitarian leisure time; the redistribution of working time; the reduction of productive, administrative, and transportation infrastructures; the relocalization, decentralization, and simplification of economic and

96 Afinoguénova, ‘Tourism and “Quality of Life” at the End of Franco’s Dictatorship’.

97 Riechmann, ‘Para una teoría de la racionalidad ecológica’, 180.

98 Sempere, *Mejor con menos*, 228.

99 Sempere, *Mejor con menos*, 223; Riechmann, ‘Para una teoría de la racionalidad ecológica’, 180.

100 Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres*, 345.

101 Fernández Durán, *El antropoceno*, 98.

social life; and, in the individual sphere, the appreciation of voluntary simplicity and the revalorization of the ethics of care.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, the vast majority of current political and economic leaders are moving in the opposite direction by focusing only on GDP growth rather than socioenvironmental well-being. To change this inertia, collective political action on a global scale is needed. Given that decisions regarding the size and nature of social metabolism affect all of humanity, present and future, they should be made with the participation of all.¹⁰³ The global financial crisis of 2008 demonstrated once again that global public opinion is not being taken into account, and that important decisions are made unilaterally by ‘technocrats’ and ‘experts’ trained in the growth paradigm. The current disagreement in Europe about what is the best way to grow after the global financial crisis is a good example of this obduracy. Neoliberals recommend austerity in government spending, tax cuts, and salary reductions to improve global competitiveness and to favor the exportation dynamic, while neo-Keynesians say that salaries and government spending must grow so that consumption may grow too. Neither party recognizes that, given the socioecological situation, the first option is socially and ecologically unsustainable while the second is environmentally unviable. The possibility of degrowing is never mentioned.

Even if the elites became sensitive to the biophysical restrictions, however, entrusting the rich and powerful with the task of degrowing our society and changing the cultural imaginary would be, if possible at all, very dangerous. The powerful and privileged are not well-suited to changing the cultural imaginary in a socially desirable fashion, for many reasons. First and foremost is that their self-perceptions and identities are deeply rooted in the neoliberal fantasy and its lack of an ethical center. Recent studies have found that individuals from higher social classes are more likely to exhibit unethical behavior and to justify existing inequality while rationalizing their privileges as well as the social benefits of greed.¹⁰⁴ That said, a desirable change of course can only happen if meaningful and collective participation in global political actions is widely pursued. Rapid cultural repoliticization is required to collectively produce activist knowledge outside of the neoliberal monopoly on meaning-making practices in order to create the necessary conditions for a desirable postgrowth society. Because the hegemonic system ‘pollutes’ people’s minds with harmful illusions and

102 Taibo, *El decrecimiento explicado con sencillez*, 52–53.

103 Sempere, *Mejor con menos*, 190.

104 Paul K. Piff et al., ‘Higher Social Class Predicts Increased Unethical Behavior’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109, no. 11 (2012): 4086–4091.

destructive metaphors—what Michel Serres calls ‘soft pollution’—and masks the real problem, it is important to interrupt the dominant narrative disseminated by corporate media, publicity, and private interests.¹⁰⁵ We can draw on a variety of approaches, from the insights of social psychology¹⁰⁶ to the deconstruction of myths related to the information and communication age¹⁰⁷ to the foregrounding of feminist economics.¹⁰⁸

Because the dominant imaginary reduces everything to a fiscal metric of material accumulation, the decolonization of education and media is crucial to enact counterhegemonic narratives and practices:

Debemos rechazar tal simplificación de la complejidad, tal exclusión de lenguajes de valoración. Debemos aceptar, por el contrario, el pluralismo de valores inconmensurables entre sí para evitar que la ciencia económica se convierta en un instrumento del poder en la toma de decisiones.

[We must reject such simplification of complexity, such exclusion of languages of valuation. We must embrace instead the pluralism of incommensurable values in order to prevent economic science from becoming the instrument of power in decision-making]¹⁰⁹

It is paramount, according to these Iberian essayists, to focus on complexity, and to incorporate the knowledge developed by the systemic paradigm of the last century, in order to understand current problems and find effective solutions.¹¹⁰ For a society to participate meaningfully in politics and make collective decisions, knowledge should not be the exclusive possession of experts—since the so-called experts are biased by all the agendas of their academic disciplines and ideologies—but a human right in the public domain.¹¹¹ It is crucial to listen to, and learn from, other epistemologies and values grounded in a variety of traditions and experiences. Many indigenous and activist sciences can offer valuable insights into the optimization of communitarian living within a relatively small social metabolism. Unfortunately, many of these diverse sources of knowledge have been extinguished by the globalization of neocolonial logic and the expansion of global markets. For this reason it is difficult to enact the ‘plural landscape

105 Serres, *Malfeasance*, 62.

106 Riechmann, *Un mundo vulnerable*, 69.

107 Fernández Durán, *Tercera Piel*, 63–68; Folch, *La quimera del crecimiento*, 115–120.

108 Pérez Orozco, *Subversión feminista de la economía*, 44.

109 Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres*, 358.

110 Riechmann, ‘Para una teoría de la racionalidad ecológica’, 195.

111 Folch, *La quimera del crecimiento*, 244–245.

of knowledge forms¹¹² or ‘ecology of knowledge’¹¹³ necessary to generate creative alternatives to the globally imposed mono-logic, and its resulting mental and biophysical homogenization.

The Iberian essayists mentioned above are valuable contributors to the ongoing transnational debate about degrowth and ecological economics. Although Spanish mainstream politics and cultural modes have not fully embraced the concerns that these thinkers wish to disseminate, following the global financial crisis a new cultural sensibility has emerged that is more receptive to notions related to degrowth and ecological economics. Carles Riba Romeva believes that the European Union as a whole may be forced to transition to energy degrowth and progressively shrink its social metabolism:

Ahora, con las reservas de energía fósil casi agotadas y con unos recursos de la biosfera limitados en relación a su población, Europa se encuentra, a su pesar, en la punta de lanza de un cambio no tan fácil: liderar el ‘decrecimiento energético’.

[Now, with the fossil energy reserves almost exhausted and with the biosphere’s resources limited in relation to its population, Europe finds itself involuntarily spearheading a difficult change: to lead ‘energy degrowth’]¹¹⁴

At present, however, ecological rationality is only practiced in small circles and is far from the norm in Europe in general or in Spain in particular. The hegemonic discourse that confuses progress and quality of life with economic growth and the urbanization of capital is still ingrained in the mentality of many Spaniards. This is not surprising given the tenacity with which technocrats and politicians in Spain and elsewhere sold that discourse during the second half of the last century. A renovation of the field of Spanish cultural studies, along with the consolidation of more radical Iberian and transatlantic studies, could contribute to the global dissemination of these ideas at the cultural level by seriously adopting ecocritical and posthumanist approaches. The Iberian thinkers covered in this section contribute to both the ongoing global critique of capitalism and the challenge of the growth-oriented cultural hegemony of Spain.

The relevance of this socioenvironmental thought is not limited to the Iberian context. Joan Martínez-Alier—one of the international leaders in ecological economics and degrowth—has claimed in a recent article that

112 Escobar, ‘Development, Violence and the New Imperial Order’, 17.

113 Santos, ‘A Non-Occidental West?’, 116.

114 Riba Romeva, *Recursos energéticos y crisis*, 272.

the potential exists for an alliance between the ‘environmental justice organizations of the global South and the small degrowth movement in Europe’:

This alliance must be based on a common stance against ‘debt-fueled’ economic growth and the hegemonic of economic accounting, and in favor of a pluralism of values, the acceptance and support of bottom-up feminist neo-Malthusianism, the defense of human rights and indigenous territorial rights along with the rights of nature, the recognition of the ecological debt, and the critique of ecologically unequal exchange.¹¹⁵

The ideas developed by Iberian socioecological thinkers are more compatible with postcolonial environmental justice movements than with the hegemonic reform environmentalism of the Euro-American tradition, since this ‘reform environmentalism has become part of a system of global managerialism, closely related to institutions like the IMF or the World Bank’.¹¹⁶ Thus their thinking can be understood as a Euro-Mediterranean contribution to the emerging transnational debate in environmental humanities. I believe that this debate should be consistently incorporated into Iberian cultural studies, where it has been almost completely absent until recently. A parallelism exists between the Iberian essayists’ version of postgrowth thought developed in the previous pages and the most popular, recent, and interesting concepts advanced by the environmental humanities—such as trans-corporeality (Alaimo), vital materialism (Bennett), and slow violence (Nixon). These concepts will be recursively mobilized throughout the book.

One example is the vital materialism advanced by Jane Bennett in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Heavily influenced by Latour’s actor network theory and its focus on the agency of networked assemblages of human and nonhuman actors, Bennett complains that

theories of democracy that assume a world of active subjects and passive objects begin to appear as thin descriptions at a time when the interactions between human, viral, animal, and technological bodies are becoming more and more intense. If human culture is inextricably enmeshed in vibrant, nonhuman agencies, and if human intentionality can wield agency only if accompanied by a vast entourage

115 Joan Martínez-Alier, ‘Environmental Justice and Economic Degrowth: An Alliance between Two Movements’, *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 23, no. 1 (2012): 66.

116 Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, 120–121.

of nonhumans, then it seems that the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory is neither the individual human nor an exclusively human collective, but rather the (ontologically heterogeneous) ‘public’ coalescing around the problem.¹¹⁷

This statement resonates with the main tenets of degrowth. It makes clear that the kind of epistemology—based on the hierarchical separation of humans and the nonhuman—which currently dominates economic and political discourses and practices cannot account for the social and ecological violence that is perpetuated by neoliberal globalization. This ‘slow violence’ is made invisible by ‘the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world’.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the same logic that exploits humans also depletes nonhumans. Thus, ‘human rights are indissociable from environmental justice’.¹¹⁹ In the past few years, more and more environmental humanists have concluded that social and environmental problems cannot be treated separately, or solved by using the same reductionist and anthropocentric logic that generated them. *Postgrowth Imaginaries* thus strives to converge environmental, social, and cultural studies in order to dialogue with socioecological movements (such as degrowth) and transdisciplinary fields (such as ecological economics and social ecology). I believe that—if we want to effectively promote emancipatory postgrowth imaginaries—decolonial thinking, cultural studies, and ecocriticism can no longer ignore one other.¹²⁰

It is clear that the dominant logic, a logic based on the separation between human individuals and the nonhuman world, cannot track the connections among, for instance, economic activity, chemical pollution, and the proliferation of cancer cells in a child’s body. A new epistemological framework is needed to understand these interconnections and interdependencies and to push for a coherent political ecology able to overcome and challenge the growth paradigm.

The ecological economics and political ecologies advocated by the Iberian socioecological essayists discussed here intend, precisely, to posthumanize and rematerialize the economic culture, thereby making their contributions complementary to the new epistemological paradigm advanced by posthumanism and material ecocriticism. In this context, posthumanism

117 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 108.

118 Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 3.

119 Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 265.

120 Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, eds., *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 339.

recognizes that ‘the decentering of the human by its imbrications in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore’ and that ‘the nature of thought itself must change if it is to be posthumanist’.¹²¹ In this regard, the constant insistence on a change of logic advocated by the Iberian writers discussed here confirms that they are moving towards a posthumanist understanding of economics, which is both radical and vital for the future viability of humanity. The current context of a global crisis of political imagination and creative thinking—fueled by the semiotic and biophysical pollution disseminated by the anthropocentric growth-oriented economic paradigm—that we (the biotic community) continue to suffer could be interrupted by a greater number of radical voices and practices participating in a global critique.

1.3. Challenging Acceleration and Techno-Optimism: The Case for a Euro-Mediterranean Degrowth-Inspired Ecocriticism

The time has come to discuss the properties and possibilities of an emerging Euro-Mediterranean ecocriticism and to examine its implications for a more established transnational ecocritical theory. The Euro-Mediterranean region is positioned in a complex and undefined economic and political area in relation to the dynamics of neoliberal globalization. The region’s participation in European capitalism is both central and peripheral. Beyond its ideological position, the region’s geographic position is also a factor in environmental thought, for the region is particularly exposed to the many risks presented by climate change. As a result, Euro-Mediterranean-focused ecocriticism has the potential to challenge the mainstream Euro-American environmental imagination and connect it to social theories such as the postcolonial and environmental justice approaches that have proliferated in the last decade. Nevertheless, most European ecocritical theory is produced in the United Kingdom and Northern Europe. A recent and important volume titled *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* reflects on the lack of any meaningful Southern European contributions.¹²² This lack is not indicative of an absence of ecological concerns in that region, but rather a sign that most of the ecological activism, practices, and thought that exists in Euro-Mediterranean countries has yet to be translated into ecocritical theory and practice by cultural scholars. This section aims to assist in this translation process.

121 Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, xv–xvi.

122 Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, eds., *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

1.3.1. Degrowth and the Slow Movement

To begin, we will focus on degrowth and the ‘slow’ movement, two socioecological movements that have emerged in European-Mediterranean regions during the past two decades. Both movements challenge the ‘illogical logic’ of constant economic growth in the context of a limited biosphere and denounce the social and ecological degradation generated by unchecked global capitalism. They also articulate a redefinition of European environmentalism by opposing the hegemonic environmental thinking of the strong Euro-American tradition—a tradition deeply ingrained in the official discourse of the European Union, such as the ‘gospel of eco-efficiency’¹²³—that tries to solve ecological problems using the same logic which causes and perpetuates them, resulting in growth-oriented strategies such as green capitalism, sustainable development, and ecological modernization. Rather than offering an alternative form of growth, the degrowth and slow movements call for systemic and sustainable alternatives to growth that are socially desirable and ecologically possible.

These alternatives are based on the recognition of ecological limits and the need to replace neoliberal fantasies with a system of social reproduction more attuned to human frailty and socioecological interdependency, one that promotes care, conviviality, voluntary simplicity, slowness, communitarian ethics, and the reduction of the economic metabolism. They point out the need for an epistemological change and question the tyranny of industrial time (which is designed to constantly augment the pace of production and consumption). The movements argue that in some regions we can and should live better with less, since it is more desirable, sustainable, and just. Since the financial crisis, the degrowth and slow movements have acquired a certain popularity and visibility beyond their Euro-Mediterranean context. In the last few years, a growing international interest in ecological economics and degrowth has yielded numerous publications in English dealing with such topics, including *Managing without Growth: Slower by Design, Not Disaster* (2008) by Peter Victor, *The End of Growth* (2011) by Richard Heinberg, *Prosperity without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* (2009) by Tim Jackson, and *Deep Economy: Economics As if the World Mattered* (2007) by Bill McKibben.¹²⁴ The growing

123 Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres*, 31.

124 Peter Victor, *Managing without Growth: Slower by Design, Not Disaster* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2008); Richard Heinberg, *The End of Growth: Adapting to Our New Economic Reality* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society, 2011); Jackson, *Prosperity without Growth*; Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: Economics as if the World Mattered* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007).

visibility of some independent organizations and think tanks, such as the New Economics Foundation, the Great Transition Initiative, and the Post Carbon Institute, also bears witness to the rise in interest in alternative economic cultures. This makes the advocates of degrowth and slow living visible actors in the fast-emerging global environmental justice movement critiquing the globalization of the growth imaginary.

The European Union's reaction to the 2008 financial crisis, inspired by neoliberal formulas, has proven to be not only wrong but highly counterproductive. Many critiques of that reaction have proposed neo-Keynesian strategies in order to reconstruct the signature welfare state that marked many Western European countries before its recent dismantling (especially noticeable in Southern European countries). But no mainstream discourse within the European Union challenges the model of growth and its socioenvironmental consequences on a regional or global scale. As Joan Martínez-Alier confirms, the discourse of the 'gospel of eco-efficiency' dominates social and political environmental debates in Europe. Terms such as 'sustainable development' or 'ecological modernization' are constantly parroted by economists and engineers working in the fields of environmental economics and industrial ecology.¹²⁵ Although these disciplines are finally considering the environment within their techno-managerial philosophies, they do not question the economic paradigm that has generated the ecological and social crisis.

The degrowth and slow movements are both critical reactions to the planetary expansion of the growth-oriented paradigm and its massive destruction of biological and epistemological diversity, and their approaches to these problems share many similarities. The degrowth and slow movements illuminate many of the blind spots in the current growth system by showing the material effects of global economic activity on environments, communities, and human health. In this regard, these movements attempt to rematerialize the economy by accounting for, and reducing, its 'social metabolism', and they also aim to make visible the growth-oriented economy's hidden violence (Nixon's 'slow violence'). The two movements advocate similar strategies of behavior that focus on participatory democracy, the reduction of working hours, redistribution, communitarian ethics, environmental enhancement, social justice, and conviviality, a ban on advertising, and the elimination of superfluous consumption. They reject the dominant imaginary of economic growth and cultural consumerism and emphasize the incompatibility of current neoliberal globalization with participatory democracy and socioecological

125 Martínez-Alier, *El ecologismo de los pobres*, 20–21.

well-being. They also point to the necessity of developing global ethical concerns, active social engagement, and communitarian lifestyles.

The Slow Food movement started in northern Italy as an alternative to the culture of fast food and strives to maintain traditional and regional cuisine:

Slow Food seeks to catalyze a broad cultural shift away from the destructive effects of an industrial food system and fast life; toward the regenerative cultural, ecological, social, and economic benefits of a sustainable food system, regional food traditions, the pleasures of the table, and a slower and more harmonious rhythm of life.¹²⁶

It encourages biodiversity through the organic cultivation of seeds and livestock characteristic of local ecosystems or bioregions, and promotes food communities that practice sustainable production, transportation, and consumption.¹²⁷ There are now Slow Food chapters in many countries, and the movement has increased steadily since its emergence in 1989. A broader 'slow movement' now encompasses multiple aspects of life: slow cities, slow travel, slow education, slow money, and so on. Slow cities, for instance, apply a slow-movement philosophy to all aspects of city life. The goal is to enhance the quality of life of residents and the biodiversity that shapes their cultural traditions by reducing noise, pollution, and stress, and by investing in community, public spaces, cooking and gardening, and healthy habits like walking and cycling.

Unlike the slow movement, which is rooted in sensual and communal experiences and the phenomenology of daily life, degrowth is a more confrontational political, economic, and social movement based on political ecology and ecological economics. At the individual level, degrowth likewise promotes convivial simplicity as a way of life, but recognizes that this is not enough to counter the systemic and structural inertia of our society's addiction to economic growth.¹²⁸ At the collective level, degrowth implies a cultural revolution.¹²⁹ It calls for a democratically led 'equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions'.¹³⁰ Degrowth

126 Petrini, *Slow Food Nation*, back cover.

127 Carlo Petrini, *Terra Madre: Forging a New Global Network of Sustainable Food Communities* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2010), 27–30.

128 Latouche, *La apuesta por el decrecimiento*, 97; Sempere, *Mejor con menos*, 205.

129 Serge Latouche, *Farewell to Growth*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 32.

130 François Schneider, Giorgos Kallis, and Joan Matínez-Alier, 'Crisis or Opportunity? Economic Degrowth for Social Equity and Ecological Sustainability', *Journal of Cleaner Production* 18, no. 6 (2010): 511.

advocates the shifting of taxes from labor to consumption, energy, pollution, and resource use in general, and offers specific proposals for policy: citizen debt audit, work sharing, basic and maximum income, green tax reform, halting subsidies for polluting activities and supporting the solidary economy, optimizing the use of buildings, reducing advertising, establishing environmental limits, and abolishing the use of GDP as an indicator of economic progress.¹³¹ Like the slow movement, degrowth also emphasizes the correlation between fast production and consumption, technological acceleration, and fast environmental and social degradation. Both movements argue that ‘consumerism is an ideology that pillages and wastes resources, but ultimately fails to satisfy needs’.¹³² Both challenge the reductionism of a global capitalist system that only considers economic growth as an indicator of human well-being, without considering other more holistic factors: in most cases, an increase in GDP actually results in a drop in quality of life and an acceleration of environmental destruction and social fragmentation.¹³³

Both movements also address the socioecological effects of scientific and technological development operating under the growth-oriented paradigm. Degrowth claims that the dominant imaginary perpetuates a blind and arrogant faith in modern technology and science¹³⁴ as a future savior and the remedy, respectively, for all our present excesses and abuses.¹³⁵ Advocates of degrowth point out that this approach ignores a number of studies which deny that techno-science is a panacea, disregards the unintended and uncontrollable consequences of the dramatic modification of a complex system, and fails to deploy the common-sense principle of prevention. The Slow Food movement explores the negative social and environmental impact and the low efficiency of centralized industrial and technological food production (petro-food), which requires a huge amount of energy, erodes the soil, pollutes the water and air, reduces biodiversity, impoverishes local rural communities, creates massive migration, fosters food insecurity and price volatility, spreads disease, and is unsustainable.¹³⁶ Additionally, the Slow Food movement stresses that the profit motive explains why

131 Kallis, *In Defense of Degrowth*, 122, 100–102.

132 Petrini, *Terra Madre*, 43.

133 Fernando Cembranos, ‘Decrecimiento e indicadores económicos. Pérdidas que hacen crecer el PIB’, in *Decrecimientos: sobre lo que hay que cambiar en la vida cotidiana*, ed. Carlos Taibo (Madrid: Catarata, 2010), 169–181; Maurizio Pallante, *La decrescita felice* (Rome: GEI, 2009), 23; Latouche, *La apuesta por el decrecimiento*, 52–53.

134 Herrero et al., *Cambiar las gafas para mirar el mundo*, 97–112.

135 Latouche, *La apuesta por el decrecimiento*, 48.

136 Petrini, *Slow Food Nation*, 23–27.

abundant corporately funded research focuses on risky biotechnology while agroecology and permaculture are woefully underfunded.

In short, the degrowth and slow movements both explore alternatives that challenge the official discourse that ‘more and faster is better’.¹³⁷ These movements propose that the ‘logic of quantity’ should be replaced by the ‘logic of quality’. Both also operate according to an understanding of sustainability that differs from that promoted by the dominant imaginary. Where reform environmentalism promises that technology holds the key to achieving sustainable ecological practices, even as it transgresses planetary boundaries and accelerates extractive processes, the degrowth and slow movements eschew technological solutions and maintain that a sustainable culture is one that does not try to exceed the pace of the regenerative cycle of the ecological system in which it is embedded. It is a culture that recognizes and lives within the limits of the Earth. Lowering consumption and adopting a slower lifestyle are thus paths towards sustainability as well as overall justice, health, and happiness.

1.3.2. Questioning Acceleration and Techno-Optimism

As I have shown in a number of previous publications, in the past decade, several fiction writers have employed sophisticated narrative strategies to focus on aspects of global capitalism, challenging the neoliberal discourse by questioning society’s blind faith in technological progress and economic growth and advocating instead for a change of logic and lifestyle. These narratives can be read as counterparts to the Euro-Mediterranean socioenvironmental movements discussed above, because they articulate a meaningful critique of the capitalist myths of progress, development, and economic growth by exposing the ecological and social consequences of capital accumulation. On the other hand, many fiction writers are still perpetuating the mainstream discourse of the European Union by privileging the uncritical celebration of digital culture, progress, and globalization while failing to acknowledge their relation to the culture of new capitalism and its environmental and social impacts. In other words, some recent fictional narratives reflect the concerns of the degrowth and slow movements while the majority of fiction continues to replicate the neoliberal fascination with technology, speed, and cyberspace.

Ecocritical approaches to Spanish texts are still rare but have the potential to contribute substantially to the interpretation of recent narratives dealing with current global issues. The socioenvironmental perspectives advanced

¹³⁷ Maurizio Pallante, *Meno e meglio. Decrescere per progredire* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2011), 6.

by the degrowth and slow movements can fruitfully be translated into ecocritical practices in order to illuminate the narrative discourses and cultural representations that challenge commonplaces and official discourses related to technological acceleration and economic growth. However, few Spanish cultural scholars are trained in environmental criticism and thus able to read cultural manifestations in ecocritical terms. For this reason, some otherwise sophisticated critics seem to celebrate and embrace the new digital environment of the information age, claiming that it is necessary to adapt to its mutations and speed while emphasizing its multiple creative possibilities. They perpetuate an unjustified technological optimism that appears to be very similar to the official Western hegemonic discourse ingrained in the European Union's environmental imaginary. These critics are oblivious to the material and biological implications, and the resulting socioenvironmental global injustice, of the techno-social changes they praise and normalize (indeed, as we will explore further in Chapter 3, digital technology is supported by a socioenvironmentally disruptive and energy-intensive material infrastructure). The more they talk about the digital environment and its network of connections, the less they mention the biological environment and its living interconnectivity. The more they promote new virtual territories and innovative artificial intelligence, the more they reinforce the mainstream consumerist dynamic that destroys cultural and biological diversity (the real collective intelligence related to real territories). They claim that we should adapt to technological speed as well as global market dynamics, which seems to be very much in line with neoliberal/transhumanist aspirations. In their techno-market-evolutionary discourse, they emphasize the Western technological implications of human/machine coevolution, but ignore or minimize the ecological violence of that process and the global social asymmetries generated by it. The postgrowth ecocritical perspective I propose in this book will reveal that the main obstacles to articulating an emancipatory political imagination able to deal effectively with the most pressing social and ecological issues arise not only from conservative denialism but also, and more disturbingly, from the aforementioned progressive techno-optimism.

Several recent novels that celebrate technology are the work of the so-called 'Nocilla' or 'Mutantes generation'. Most of these authors started publishing in the twenty-first century. Their novels share certain commonalities, such as the tremendous importance placed on new communication and information technologies, the integration of many interdisciplinary Western concepts, the use of multimedia, and a fluent dialogue with the globalizing consumerist culture and its mass-media vehicles. The key question for me is whether these authors are reflecting or perpetuating the growth-oriented,

techno-optimist dominant imaginary (probably both). Among the most active members of this generation are Agustín Fernández Mallo, Manuel Vilas, and Vicente Luis Mora. Although their works have the potential to be illuminated by an ecocritical or posthumanist approach,¹³⁸ a number of critics tend to accept their valorization of consumerist globalization and Western techno-science without questioning its logic in any profound way. Some of these texts can also be interpreted as social critiques due to their cynical and ironic tone, but their ambiguity suggests that they are in fact playing the postmodern game of satirizing hegemonic discourses while perpetuating them. This is the case with Vicente Luis Mora's *Alba Cromm* (2010) and Manuel Vilas's *Aire Nuestro* (Our Air, 2009).¹³⁹ Instead of presenting some of the novels of the Mutantes themselves—which are not useful for the purposes of this book, given their ambiguity—I have chosen to examine, from an ecocritical perspective, a work of criticism that praises this generation of writers. This will allow me to expose the blind spots of critics who assess these writers positively, to the unintended advantage of the hegemonic economic and political discourse, and to demonstrate the importance of developing an ecocritical approach to correct this situation and enrich the reading of technology-infused fiction by contributing a different point of view.

A literary-critical article by Christine Henseler, one of the most visible advocates of the new generation of writers, is a good illustration of critical interpretations that fail to consider the relationship between Mutantes fiction and the dominant neoliberal discourse.¹⁴⁰ In 'Spanish Mutant Fictioneers: Of Mutants, Mutant Fiction and Media Mutations', Henseler asserts that these authors acknowledge a 'breakdown of traditional hierarchical structures' that perceives 'contemporary society not as a vertical, but as a horizontal web'. Their works translate technological 'spaces of communication' such as the internet and virtual reality into a 'dissolution of linear time for a more absolute presence and circularity, virtual identity, a return of a totality understood in terms of a multiple and instantaneous globality, a non-existence of locals, and a non-existence of truth concepts'. In addition, these authors 'are global

138 See Katarzyna Beilin, 'Die and Laugh in the Anthropocene: Disquieting Realism and Dark Humor in *Biutiful* and *Nocilla experience*', in *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates*, ed. Katarzyna Beilin and William Viestenz (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016), 89–111.

139 Vicente Luis Mora, *Alba Cromm* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2010); Manuel Vilas, *Aire Nuestro* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2009).

140 Christine Henseler, 'Spanish Mutant Fictioneers: Of Mutants, Mutant Fiction and Media Mutations', *Ciberletras* 24 (December 2010), <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v24/henseler.html>.

nomadic citizens with backgrounds in a host of disciplines'. They celebrate their lack of roots and the convergence of old and new media in a consumerist global culture as well as in the rise of intercultural and transcultural connections. They are both self-critical and self-promotional in their use of social digital networks and multimedia platforms. Finally, they perpetuate the idea of dematerialization in the information age.

An ecocritic responding to this characterization of the Mutantes from a degrowth perspective will notice immediately the similarities between the aforementioned statements and the neoliberal discourse related to the 'eco-modernists'. Both the novels and the critics who praise them promote the necessity of adapting technologically and mentally to the culture of the global market economy rather than to the limits of the biosphere. Paradoxically, the celebration of digital convergence and social horizontality ignores the ecological unity of the biosphere (the actual systemic convergence of all networks) and its degradation by the asymmetrical and highly hierarchical global economic powers that are exacerbated by digital financial innovations. Additionally, the dissolution of linear time associated with network technologies does not translate into the appreciation of and adjustment to ecologically regenerative, communitarian, and cyclical time—a necessary condition for sustainability. On the contrary, it embraces the fast pace of consumerism and the acceleration of market dynamics that are causing the annihilation of most living systems on the planet. Furthermore, these novels and critics are reinforcing an ideology of progress and development that is sustained by the illusion of the possibility of constant economic growth and technological innovation—concepts associated with and created by linear modes of thinking. The silenced fact is that, at the time I write, 'the server farms that allow the internet to operate and that provide cloud-based digital computing [have] surpassed the airline industry in terms of the amount of carbon dioxide released into the earth's atmosphere'.¹⁴¹

When these authors and critics talk about transcultural connections, global citizenship, and the nonexistence of locals, they are not seeing the global picture from the vantage point of non-Western epistemologies. It is well recognized in decolonial and indigenous studies that neoliberal globalization is rapidly destroying not only biodiversity, but cultural and epistemological diversity as well, since biological and cultural diversity go hand in hand. When Henseler mentions the lack of roots and global nomadism, it is obvious that she is not referring to ecocosmopolitanism¹⁴²

141 Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, 'Introduction: Ecologies of Media', *Ecomedia Key Issues*, ed. Stephen Rust et al. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3.

142 Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, 205–210.

or a transnational ethic of place,¹⁴³ but rather to the cosmopolitan elite that moves through what Marc Augé calls ‘nonplaces’, such as airports, gas stations, malls, taxis, and global hotel chains.¹⁴⁴ She avoids the fact that most people live in a real territory and that their livelihood and cultural survival depends on it. The fact that some privileged groups can have no roots comes with a huge externalized socioenvironmental cost, since such groups depend on the consumption of huge amounts of fossil fuels. Furthermore, as Rob Nixon explains, using the distinction between the nomadic and the rootless articulated by Abdelrahman Munif, nomadic cultures are not rootless, since they are inscribed in the land through movement (belonging-in-motion), ‘but the deracinations of the oil age plummeted them into a rootlessness that was nomadism’s opposite. Driven from their lands, increasingly urbanized, repressed and exploited by a corrupt upper class in cahoots with American oil interests, many lower-class Bedouin found themselves culturally humiliated and politically estranged’.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, it seems urgent to revisit (from a more critical perspective) the way in which this generation of writers and their critics use the terms ‘nomadism’ and ‘rootlessness’.

The Mutantes authors’ acclaimed interdisciplinarity and fascination with science and technology is highly ethnocentric, since their approach exclusively embraces modern Western disciplines, science, and technology. They tend to avoid any reference to the imperial, androcentric, and (neo) colonial logic behind the global expansion of modern Western epistemology (and its technology). The question of digital colonialism—how the internet reinforces social, economic, and cultural hegemony—is never seriously entertained.¹⁴⁶ This point becomes obvious when attention is paid to what indigenous epistemologies, ecofeminism, and decolonial thinking say about modern Western culture, science, and technology. But, apparently, decolonial thinking and ecofeminism do not register within the so-called interdisciplinarity of these writers. Some of the Mutantes writers and their critics seem more attracted to the networked and connected individualism promoted by global capitalism than to a more ecological and equitable posthumanist communitarian ethic. When they play with commercial and hyper-consumerist discourses, they appear to be more interested

143 Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 143.

144 Marc Augé, *Non-places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2009).

145 Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 76.

146 See ‘Digital Colonialism & the Internet as a Tool of Cultural Hegemony’, <http://www.knowledgecommons.in/brasil/en/whats-wrong-with-current-internet-governance/digital-colonialism-the-internet-as-a-tool-of-cultural-hegemony/>.

in how this game can enable them to enhance or market their artistic expressions than in how the toxic materiality of consumerism negatively affects human and nonhuman communities around the globe (more on this in Chapter 3). Finally, as Ramón Fernández Durán points out, ‘The society of image and information helps to hide even more the very serious ecological crisis we face, especially because it encourages a shift in focus from the biosphere to the infosphere (cyberspace, virtual reality), making more invisible the deterioration of the First Skin, of Mother Nature’.¹⁴⁷ The acclaimed information society is an illusion that hides the rapid loss of real information (genetic, biological, cultural); the more colorful and defined the virtual images become on our computer screens, the faster real information disappears due to the ecological degradation and massive extinction provoked by the urban-agro-industrial system and its ongoing digital-financial accelerations.¹⁴⁸

Some of these authors and critics seem to be more conventional than they would like to acknowledge. While they claim to be subverting or questioning the official discourse, they are actually perpetuating and embroidering it. The point is that global capitalism with its digital culture allows (and sometimes encourages, for commercial reasons) the subversion and transgression of norms, but never tolerates the epistemological transformation of the growth paradigm that would reduce social metabolism and decelerate daily life. Transgressing without transforming only reinforces the hegemonic imaginary. This coincides with the critique of some tendencies in North American cultural studies advanced by Cary Wolfe, following Tilottama Rajan and Gayatri Spivak. The problem seems to be the evolution of cultural studies ‘from a site of “decentering innovation” into “a symbiosis with globalization” and the New World Order, in which “its dereferencialization is what makes it dangerous to some of its original components”’.¹⁴⁹ In other words, Wolfe writes, ‘the effect of academically mainstreamed cultural studies is ... “to simulate the preservation of civil society after the permutation of the classical public sphere” into an essentially market and consumerist logic of “representation”’.¹⁵⁰ I see the obsession of the Mutantes (critics and authors alike) with hybridification, evolution, adaptation, convergence, integration, and mutation not as a posthumanist understanding of social and political ecology, but rather as an unintended promotion of ‘the liberal project of incorporation and “recognition” that is an expression of, not a

147 Fernández Durán, *El antropoceno*, 90.

148 Herrero et al., *Cambiar las gafas para mirar el mundo*, 233–261.

149 Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, 104, quoting Tilottama Rajan.

150 Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, 104, quoting Tilottama Rajan.

critique of, globalization'.¹⁵¹ To Henseler's assertion that 'to read the texts of the *Mutantes 2.0* demands a 2.0 Literary Critic', I add that to see the blind spots of both *Mutantes 2.0* and 2.0 Literary Critics demands an ecocritical approach.¹⁵² Perhaps the emerging field of ecological digital humanities, 'developed from the mingling of the environmental humanities and the digital humanities', will soon provide some much-needed critical tools in this regard.¹⁵³

In conclusion, we need more narratives and practices that contribute to decolonizing the dominant imaginary and its ideology of cultural consumerism, technological acceleration, and economic growth. As this chapter suggests and the rest of the book will demonstrate, the incorporation of a postgrowth ecocriticism attentive to issues of environmental justice can make a significant difference for Iberian cultural studies. In this regard, the ecological digital humanities could help ecocritical cultural studies to understand the new media dynamics involved in neoliberal globalization and provide creative options for decolonizing it, rather than reducing all life to a colonized ecology of new media. Fortunately, the Spanish cultural repolitization during and after the 15-M movement may be doing just that, as Moreno-Caballud explains, by using the internet to enhance a collaborative creation of value that challenges the 'type of technoscientific cultural authority that tends to monopolize the production of meaning'.¹⁵⁴ The Spanish cultural outcome of this appropriation of neoliberal technology to challenge the dominant imaginary remains to be seen.

151 Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, 105.

152 Henseler, 'Spanish Mutant Fictioneers'.

153 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Stephanie LeMenager, 'Introduction: Assembling the Ecological Digital Humanities', *PMLA* 131 (2016): 340.

154 Moreno-Caballud, *Cultures of Anyone*, 144.

