

Frugality as a choice vs frugality as a social condition.
Is de-growth doomed to be an Eurocentric project?

Roldan Muradian

Universidade Federal Fluminense

Brazil

This presentation is a commentary (response) to the paper entitled “Five theses on the relationships between degrowth and the environmental justice movement”, written by Akbulut, Demaria, Gerber and Martinez-Alier

That paper is based on the premise that the dissemination of degrowth propositions would need the establishment of coalitions with disadvantaged social groups in lower income countries

I very much agree. Communication is needed not only with the EJ movement, but also with low income social groups in both rich and developing countries in general.

Otherwise, the degrowth movement would remain as an initiative representing the values of a “green elite”, who can afford to voluntarily consume less in an affluent society while benefiting from a well developed welfare state

So far, the degrowth movement has been basically an (utopian) Eurocentric project.

Would it remain so ?

How able is it to resonate with other social groups, particularly disadvantaged groups in less wealthy parts of the world?

Thesis I: *The EJ movement and the degrowth critique are both materialist and non-materialist in scope*

Response: The European degrowth movement is a clear expression of post-materialist values

It would be inconsistent to hold both materialist and post-materialist values

These are confronted value systems

Inglehart' division of values

Materialist

Post-materialist

Give priority to:

Economic and physical
security

Self-expression and
nonmaterial quality of
life

According to Inglehart`s theoretical framework, degrowth is a postmodern movement

Postmodern values :

- Emphasize self-expression instead of deference to authority
- Are tolerant to other social groups, and consider cultural diversity as stimulating and interesting, not as threatening
- Give priority to environmental protection and cultural issues, even when these goals conflict with economic growth
- Linked with declining acceptance of rigid religious norms concerning sex and reproduction

Many EJ movements in developing countries are about defending the cultural and physical bases of livelihoods. It is the very existence and stability of life that is being threatened by external interventions.

They are not necessarily about promoting “nonmaterial quality of life” but about defending a livelihood against an external threat

Thesis II: *Both degrowth and the EJ movement seek a politico-metabolic reconfiguration*

Response: It is very unlikely to find a common ground with disadvantaged populations in lower income countries appealing to a downscaling of production and consumption

It is the reproduction and production capacities of affected populations that are being threatened by “interventions”. This has nothing to do with voluntary downscaling of production or consumption of those populations.

EJ movements generally are not anti-capitalist or anti-systemic.

Most of the time, what hold people together is opposition to a particular project or unfair situation in terms of distribution of costs and benefits. The main concern is not about the scale of the overall system, but distributive in scope.

Thesis III: *Both degrowth and EJ seek justice, consequentially as well as deontologically*

Response: I agree. Both have a progressive justice agendas

EJ uses traditional mobilization strategies for seeking justice: protests, legal action, resistance, campaigns, etc.

However, voluntary frugality seems a very naive strategy (extremely inoffensive) for achieving global justice

Is appealing to voluntary frugality likely to change power imbalances ?

The evidence does not support the proposition of a slow but constant evolution towards post-materialist values in wealthy countries, and even less in lower income countries

What to do in a context of rising conservative policy responses to perceived injustices?

The proposition of downscaling consumption and production is too far away from the (social and environmental) problems of most disadvantaged people in lower income countries

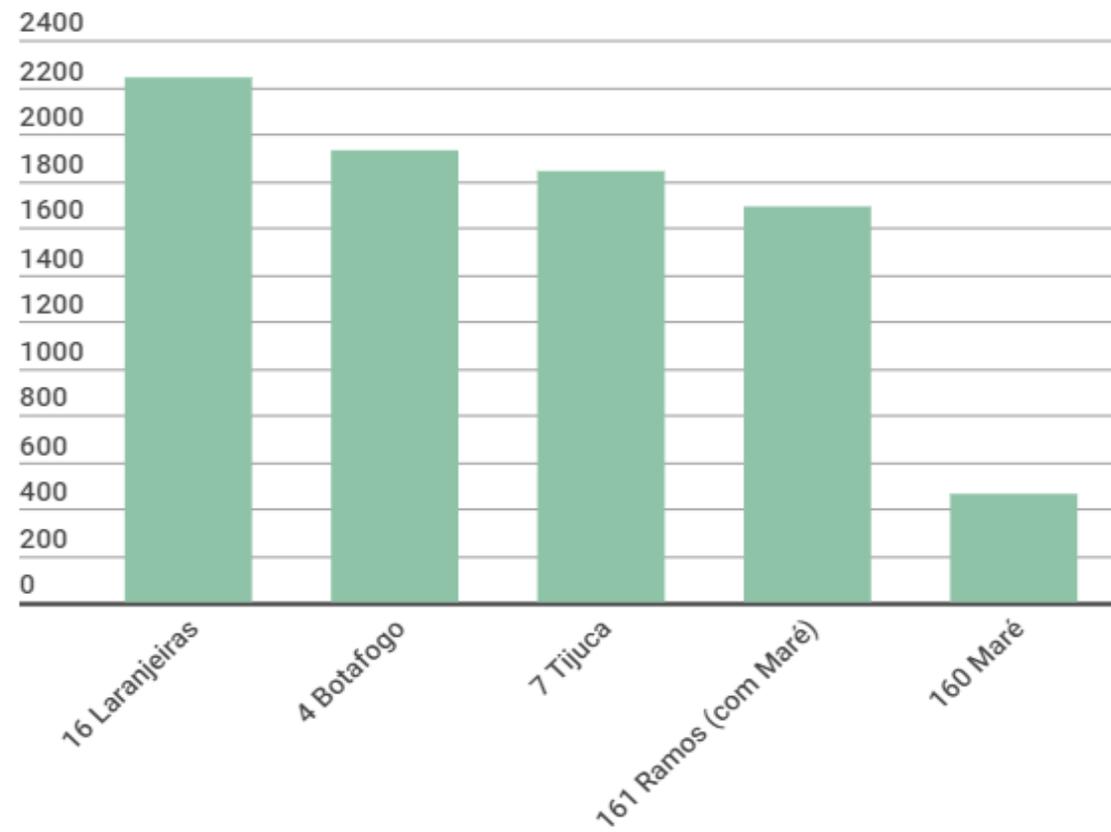
“the myriads of EJ movements represent one of the most powerful socio-political forces in the global South”

But what about the socio-political force of the conservative poor (on the rise worldwide)?



Votação de Marielle nas eleições de 2016

Por zona eleitoral





CANDIDATOS



CRIVELLA
PRB

59,36%

1.700.030 votos



MARCELO FREIXO
PSOL

40,64%

1.163.662 votos



BRANCOS

149.866 votos

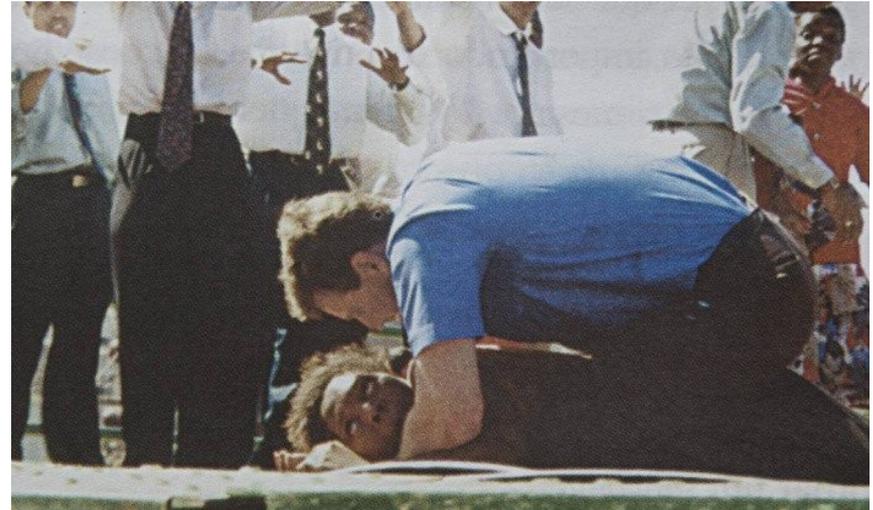


NULOS

569.536 votos



No meio do Soweto, na África do Sul, no Anfiteatro Jabulani, o poder do nome de Jesus veio para ajudar aqueles que estavam sofrendo e sendo atormentados pelos espíritos imundos



Thesis IV: Degrowth and EJ are complementary – EJ lacks a broader theoretical roadmap while degrowth lacks a wider movement

Response: A theoretical background that adopts “frugality as a choice” is not very appealing to those who live “frugality as a social condition”, neither to those who feel that their reproduction and production capacities are externally threatened



Thesis V: Whereas Marxism emphasizes the capital vs. labour contradiction, both degrowth and EJ emphasize the contradiction between capitalist growth vs. living conditions

Is degrowth pleading to move out of capitalism?

If yes, it is not sufficiently explicit about it

If not, then it seems to have weak theoretical bases

Economic growth seems to be a structural feature of capitalism. More than a goal, it is a consequence of innovation. As far as it would be innovation in the capitalism system there would be growth.

Putting the emphasis on downscaling consumption and production may be misleading. The issue might be the type and quality of consumption and production, and not the scale (in monetary terms). That is, the issue might be about the type of innovation needed, not about stopping innovation.

Most EJ movements are not anti-systemic, they are anti a specific project or given unfair condition affecting a particular social group

Degrowth is doomed to be an Eurocentric project as far as it does resonate with the aspirations and values of disadvantaged social groups in lower income countries

Those groups often hold conservative values

There is a huge value gap between degrowth advocates and the masses of disadvantaged social groups in lower income countries.

This seems to be very much overlooked by degrowth proponents.

How to build bridges and communicate with them remains as an unaddressed issue within the degrowth movement