

“Critical Reflections from The Global South”

# DE- GROWTH

عالمين مختلفين  
بين الإسماله والتبالم  
أو شخص واحد ولكن  
له حيتين حياه المعيد  
وحياه القاهره







# **Degrowth**

## **Critical Reflections from the Global South**

**May 2025**





Egypt Office

**“ Critical Reflections from The Global South”**  
**DE-GROWTH**

Prepared as an outcome of the Urban Lab Camp 2024\*

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In March 2017, a new supplementary protocol was signed in Berlin by the Egyptian and German governments, amending the cultural agreement of 1959. The Egyptian Parliament ratified this protocol in July 2017, and it came into effect in November of the same year under Presidential Decree No. 267/2017.

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- Empowerment of civil society
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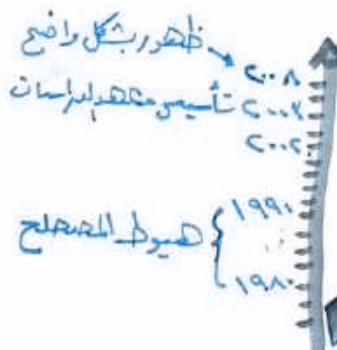
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الطوفان ← بعد الطوفان  
مع المياح في Degrowth [تأنيق] واستعد بالله  
سازل هناك قريتين والحرب ستيمر  
والطوفان قادم

خدعة الرفاهية واحتلال الصالح الرأسمالية

إعادة ادراك العادة من وجهة نظر وليس نظرا العالم

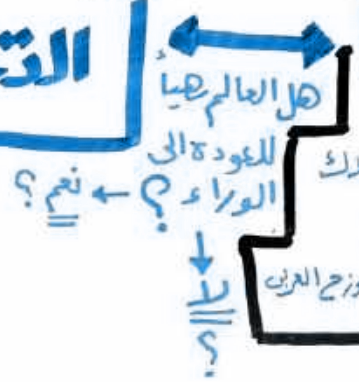
# هل الحل في تفكيك النمو



فهم المصطلح

# DEC

# التحيز المناخي





الاستدامة

ما بعد التنمية

تفكيك النمو  
مقدمة

ما هي التنمية  
من هو المتقدم  
من هو التخلف

GROWTH

لجيسون هيكل

هل للتنمية  
كالموج

لا يوجد نموذج  
عالي موحد

- \* الرأسمالية لها الشيطان الاكبر
- \* مخدم الافراط في الانتاج والاسته
- \* يجب انه يمدش في دول الشمال
- \* اما دول الجنوب لتطور لكن تهرسه الف

ليس كل نمو اقتصاد  
فقط



## Forward

### Ascending Straight Line

“It seems that the world is growing in reverse for us, the countries of the South.”

An ascending straight line is often expected in economic growth, as such development projects and narratives are founded and created. Nations compete over natural resources to continue this upward trajectory towards prosperity. However, the flip side of this expectation to maintain the speed and boldness of the ascending straight line is that it moves like a carriage, breaking bodies in its path. Is it possible to slow down so that to think or reconsider the trajectory? Are nations really growing, or is it just a silly game that the world has been engaged in for thousands of years and has not lost its allure?

This publication features the outcomes of the sixth Urban Lab Camp (ULC) held from 12 to 16 September 2024, in partnership between Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Egypt Office, and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, in collaboration with the Human and the City for Social Research (HCSR) and several specialists. Partici-



pants exceeded twenty, geographically ranging from the far north on the Mediterranean coast to the far south in Aswan, and varied between cities and villages, with many being constant migrants between the two seeking better opportunities. Their educational and professional backgrounds varied across economics, urban planning, agriculture, arts, and humanities, embodying the cognitive diversity that serves the broader and more comprehensive concept of urbanism as understood by the organizing team. ULC program was designed to span over four days in Port Said<sup>1</sup>. Sessions varied between introductory discussions on urban concepts and their applications, and others on climate change and its relationship to the concept of degrowth. Presenters ensured that the sessions were interactive and discussion-oriented. These sessions also included mini-workshops to develop writing ideas, whether as reflections on the sessions or as developments of original ideas.

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1- Port Said was chosen in an attempt to deconstruct the centrality of Greater Cairo and to some extent Alexandria, and to closely examine a model of the urban city with its distinctive economic, urban, and heritage aspects and the challenges it may face due to «development» and «growth». This was evident in the discussion with Aya Ayman Muslim; the director of the short film «Between Two Shores,» which showcased examples of youth from Port Said who were forced to move to Cairo.



This year, ULC focused on the concept of “degrowth”, challenging traditional economic growth models by offering alternative paths prioritizing environmental sustainability, urban justice, and social equity. Throughout the ULC proceedings, degrowth was approached from various angles-- linguistic, historical, philosophical, and economic, linking it to climate change challenges and urban issues. ULC drew on the pioneering work of Jason Hickel, providing a strong knowledge base for the participants to develop their discussions and produce Arabic texts addressing the concept from different perspectives, which comprise the volume now in your hands.

The organizing team had shared the workshop’s goal and final product with the participants, which helped generate side discussions and production attempts outside the session framework. The team saw this as an activity to be nurtured and supported, leading them to redesign the program and leave more room for this.

The texts in this publication attempt to form critical and cognitive reflections stemming from our local context and positionality in Egypt, as an integral part of the Global South concerned and weary of attempts to catch up with growth. We sought to deconstruct the concept of growth to preserve what remains of humanity and nature, posing questions about who benefits from growth and who is excluded. The idea came from the practical importance of these



discussions, as well as the personal need to pause and reflect on the mistakes we make, as the countries of the South seem to be growing in reverse.





# Introduction

## Degrowth?

In recent years, the world has witnessed a resurgence in criticism of capitalism after a relative lull following interest in post-development ideas, especially among thinkers from the Global South such as the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar, the Mexican thinker Gustavo Esteva, the Iranian thinker Majid Rahnema, or European thinkers such as the German Wolfgang Sachs. Despite slight differences in the ideas of this trend, they converge around a single intellectual foundation-- rejecting Western development models and their imposition of standards as a hegemonic process that leads to neglecting local cultures and societies.

In what can be considered as an evolution and another perspective on these ideas, the concept of “degrowth” emerges, an economic and social approach that reshapes the relationship between economic growth, social progress, and environmental sustainability. It introduces the idea of prioritizing social justice, environmental justice, and human well-being over the sole goal of boosting purely economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP).



The idea originated as a reaction to the environmental and economic crises the world has experienced since the 1970s. In 1972, the term was first introduced by the French philosopher Andre Gorz, and then the Club of Rome released a report titled “The Limits to Growth”, warning that excessive reliance on economic growth in a resource-limited environment would lead to environmental and social disasters. The discussion waned again in the 1990s, but with the increasing global concern about sustainability and environmental justice, the concept of degrowth found supporters among contemporary researchers and activists following the first international conference in 2008 in Paris. The term appeared in English and spread beyond Europe, becoming a social movement calling for a radical change in how we understand well-being and progress.

Degrowth argues that continuous economic growth as a goal leads to resource depletion, increased carbon emissions, and biodiversity loss. The original purpose of growth is to achieve well-being, so if it deviates to become a goal in itself to satisfy certain interests, it



leads to increased social inequality, where the wealthiest classes disproportionately benefit, while the suffering of the poor worsens, and economic disparities increase.

Jason Hickel is one of the most prominent proponents of the idea in the contemporary world. His works are translated into many languages and have been relied upon to open discussions during ULC. According to Hickel, degrowth is based on several principles:

1. Reducing economic and social inequalities by redistributing wealth to achieves social justice.
2. Reducing resource consumption and waste, and focusing on necessary production to limit environmental degradation.
3. The independence of different communities to redefine their well-being based on their own givens, away from pure economic standards. This may involve indicators of general happiness, quality of life, human relationships, and time freedom.

Costa Rica can be regarded as a successful model of degrowth as seen by Jason Hickel, even if they call it “Buen Vivir” (the good life). Despite having a low GDP rate compared to advanced countries, Costa Rica records high well-being rates. It relies on an economic model based on environmental sustainability, reducing dependence on heavy industries, and providing high-quality healthcare



and education services. This enables its population to have high living standards without the need for high economic growth.

However, applying the concept on a global scale faces significant challenges, including resistance from mega multinational corporations which rely on continuous growth to achieve profits, control by states, pressures of global economic policies, and the influence of international institutions that promote economic growth as a measure of civilization. This transformation also requires a significant cultural change within societies. The concept of well-being needs to be redefined, after decades of cultural dependency of consumerism as a measure of happiness, rooted by capitalism and deepened by several regimes. Redefining social concepts entails societal dialogue, which most countries in the Global South, languishing under Northern-supported dictatorships, do not experience. This also requires a revival of cultures that are on the path to extinction, if not already disappeared. From a Southern perspective, what appears to be a fantastic idea for achieving justice is the same scenario that always unfolds-- the Global North comes to demand that the South overturn everything imposed on it over the last two hundred years: shifting the focus from excessive consumption and material prosperity to public happiness, well-being, and environmental balance to absolve historical responsibilities and moral and material debts.



## Growth and Climate Change

Climate Change is global challenge affecting our daily lives. Its impacts include warming temperatures, changes in precipitation, increases in the frequency or intensity of some extreme weather events, and rising sea levels that threaten our health and affect daily life via food that we eat, the water we drink and the weather.

Despite international efforts and agreements, climate change remains pressing global challenge specially for the Global South.

Egypt is highly affected by climate change impacts. According to the World Bank 2022 report, estimates for Egypt suggested that by 2060 the combined impact of climate change will represent between 2% and 6% of Egypt's GDP. Degrowth can be considered a socio-economic concept and a movement that advocates for the intentional downscaling of production and consumption to achieve a sustainable and equitable society. In recent debates on environmental problems and policies, the concept has appeared as an alternative strategy to reduce environment pressure. Degrowth advocates argue that to address climate change effectively, societies must consume fewer resources, produce less waste, and minimize energy consumption.

As a consequence of climate change heat waves and extreme weath-



er events in Egypt may reduce agricultural productivity, making it harder to meet the food demands of its growing population. Under degrowth, reduced investments could lower agricultural and crop productivity due to increased soil salinity, excessive weather events or heat. Lack of science and technology transfer in agriculture and irrigation systems may aggravate this shortage of crop productivity, resulting in food shortages and price increases.

Regarding health care systems, patients needed to be treated from communicable and non-communicable diseases specially diabetes, cardiovascular and cancer in order to ensure prevention of infectious diseases (such as hepatitis and other diseases). Cancerous and cardiovascular diseases needed to be treated with new technological medicines. Patients should have an easy access to health care and should be early investigated to have a better curing chance. A degrowth strategy may limit the Ministry of Health ability to purchase vaccines, drugs, kits for medical laboratories and medical equipment that can ensure a good treatment for the right patient at the right time and ensure a better prognosis of diseases, as well as make vaccines available in order to prevent infectious diseases for children. Maternal health will also be affected due to the limited economic resources under degrowth strategy and the government might struggle to fund these essential programs and to ensure healthy lives.



Through the series of discussions that were held during the Urban Lab Camp, the concept of achieving well-being and better life through degrowth did not show real evidences. This may be due to the different definitions and visions of well-being from one to the other. Well-being may be defined as the state of being comfortable, healthy, and happy. It encompasses a balance of physical, mental, emotional, and social health. Breathing pure clean air, having an easy access to nature and sea, social life and spending time with family and friends are also a necessity and may be related to well-being.

Others may mention that high-tech life style involving digital devices and being always online with stable internet connection is a must for well-being. Degrowth may be introduced as a new strategy to decrease environmental pressure and for a better well-being for humans. However, and to the best of my knowledge, it should not be defined as a model that can be applied or replicated in the Global South and countries with high population density such as Egypt. Every society has to define its well-being and set its indicators to measure and best strategies, whether growth or degrowth strategies, and accordingly take steps towards achievement.



## **Critique of Degrowth: A Brown Citizen with Economic Freedom!**

Why do the peoples of the South hate degrowth? In other words, why do I hate degrowth? Do you know what growth is? For the peoples of the North, growth means industrial development that has led to an increase in GDP, contributing to civilization, urban, and economic progress, and creating a happy capitalist society. However, no one from the North talks about how the sustainability of this society depends on the colonization and enslavement of the people of the South. Therefore, the people of the North were keen to establish a complex colonial capitalist system that is difficult to dismantle, creating generations of Southern children who believe in the necessity of maintaining these colonies to provide the prerequisites for prosperity and reasons for living.

The premise of degrowth talks about reducing production, and curbing excessive energy use and consumption, but within the current economic and political system, which is merely an extension of the previous colonial system. We are still prisoners of colonization, real armed colonization. Joao Romero in his article on Critique of the Idea of Growth and Degrowth: From Developed Countries to Developing Countries says that the growth experience creates a unique social experience for the communities that have obtained it,



and thus social roles in this society are determined based on their productivity and capital, qualifying them to assume other political and economic roles. But until this moment the people of the South do not enjoy this privilege; there are social roles, but they are simple and aimed at serving the complex Northern systems.

For a long time, the people of the North have treated the countries of the South as sources of resources for continuous production and cheap labour, and, my dear, do not believe anything else- genocide just a few steps away is sufficient to confirm that. The people of the South are tired of idealistic ideas of justice and equality that are difficult to implement. Hickel says that if growth is an alternative to equality, then equality can be an alternative to growth. However, he did not talk about the nature of equality and whether it will be racial or religious equality. Will there be true economic democracy and political freedom? All non-capitalist systems have failed because they bet on humans' love for justice, while history proves that humans always seek control and increased influence.

Therefore, before we talk about degrowth, we must discuss white hegemony, subordination, and racial superiority. We must address economic, financial, and political colonization openly and declare that the current banking system is a new colonial system. Before we urge the North to reduce or deconstruct growth, France must



that the current banking system is a new colonial system. Before we urge the North to reduce or deconstruct growth, France must liberate Mali, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and other countries. The United Kingdom must liberate Anguilla and the British Virgin.

When we are liberated, I want sufficient guarantees that as a brown citizen, I will have the freedom to choose the economic system that suits me. I want assurances that my rejection of the white capitalist system will not lead to American occupation or a political system that restricts me and returns my community to the shackles of debt.

If I receive these guarantees, then we can talk about degrowth.

Urban Lab Camp 2024 Team





# Writings

**Towards Degrowth: Reflections on  
Urbanism, Climate Change,  
and Positionality**



This publication is an invitation to contemplate the concept of “de-growth” from the perspective of the Global South, and specifically from the Egyptian experience. It seeks to provide a thorough reading that questions the concept and reframes it in line with local challenges and aspirations, not just simply explaining or rendering it into Arabic.

The publication addresses issues that intersect between urbanism and climate change, shedding light on the complex relationships between material and consumptive growth in cities on one hand, and the need for more sustainable patterns of urban development on the other. It offers multiple reflections on the questions related to the feasibility of implementing degrowth as a practical approach, analysing the challenges and concerns that may arise, in addition to future aspirations and alternative visions that may lead to a more just reality.



The publication also includes diverse ideas resulting from the cognitive engagement with the concept, some of which reframe the relationship between natural resources and consumption, while others discuss the connection between urbanism and climate justice. It highlights insights related to local positioning and the Global South, and the deconstruction of the centralization that has long dominated development thinking.

This publication aspires to be at once a tool for critical and practical thinking, opening new spaces for discussion on how to create alternatives to traditional development that has long relied on resource depletion and marginalization. It is a call to reconsider concepts of progress and advancement, and to design a future that aligns with our local needs and potentials.





كيف كانت الحياة قبل الرأسمالية  
هل الإنسان مسيرة الفردية  
قدما لكن الانسان ينتقل في  
الجماعة



DEGROWth

# كيف ننزج

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نقل المفهوم  
وليس ترجمه  
المصطلح ؟

استخدام الاستعداد  
والبحث عن المعنى

وضع مجرعه سه  
الخيارات ومحاولة  
الوصول لهدف الموضوع

المفهوم الفرنسي  
استخدم انجهار  
والغيره الزهر

التوازن

هل هو نحو ؟  
او اقتصادي

لا يجب انه يكون غير محدود

DE  
الاعارة

تدقيق

يجب انه يمكن  
فهم الرساليه

التعاضد الاقتصادي

الانقاص الاقتصادي  
في جملته القديم

القوام المصنوع

المفرد العادل

تعدد القوم

القوم الطبيعي

يجب ان نقلهم كل جوانب  
الموضوع حتى نتفهم من  
الترجمة اليه

لا للنمو  
النظريه لم تشرح  
او توجد بديل

النمو المحكوم

استخدم العالم فكره الهدره في تسمية  
المصطلح

هل من المهم حاله الاهتمام  
بترجمة الكلمه ولكن ايديت  
فهم الايجابيات والسلبات  
والاثر

يجب الترجمة

المصطلح

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# 1

Book One:  
**Language as a Vessel  
of Thought**

“What are you Saying?”



## “What are you Saying?”

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When we began preparing for the theme of this edition of the Urban Lab Camp, the question of how to translate the term “degrowth” into Arabic was among the first questions we posed and began to contemplate. We tried to leverage our diverse scientific and professional backgrounds as a working team, as well as our different linguistic backgrounds as Arabic speakers- our mother tongue, and our proficiency in English- the language of most writings on the topic, and French- in which the concept was first written about. We also consulted friends, colleagues, and specialists from various relevant backgrounds- economics, environment, sociology, and urbanism, in addition to linguistics and translation.

After delving into the Arabic content- very scarce on the topic- we compiled an extensive list of options and suggestions. We worked on verifying the Arabic connotations of each term and the extent to which it reflects the essence of the “degrowth” concept as we understood it and sought to present. We then resorted to the exclusion theory to arrive at a shortlist of proposed translations as a draft subject to continuous revisiting, reviewing, and updating. These included terms referring to reducing growth, negative



growth, shrinkage, alternative growth, growth reversal, redirecting growth...

After lengthy discussions, we settled on a term stressing the idea of deconstruction in the prefix “de”. We agreed to present the topic for discussion during the lab sessions. Participants following the same pattern suggested other alternatives according to their engagement with the concept: growth rationalization, comprehensive growth, growth rebound/ economic rebound, balanced/ moderate growth, moderated growth, growth renewal, growth restructuring, positive growth, controlled growth/ disciplined growth, downsizing growth, growth slowdown, growth tsunami, invisible growth... We agreed not to standardize the translation and to leave space for participants to engage with the concept in meaning and terminology without guidance.

Therefore, the terms used in the participants’ writings (in the original texts in Arabic) vary, and many of them delve into this issue extensively in an effort to contribute to an Arabic knowledge product on the concept. On the other hand, some preferred to ignore



technical discussions about translation accuracy and immediately delved into discussions of application and the concept itself. For example, one participant decided to translate the term as “Slowdown and seek guidance from God”, and this translation may be the first engagement with the concept from our global perspective.

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**DEGROWTH**

رد على فريضة لكل استهلاك  
من نظم الدولويات اختلاف مفهوم  
الرفاهية  
استجالت طبيعة تنكيد النمو في عصر!  
الخصران في النضج الحاني هو الفرد  
المستهلك فقط.



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## **What if Minia's Corniche was to "Grow"?**

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Abdullah Rabea M. Hussein



## What if Minia's Corniche was to "Grow"?

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Before discussing "degrowth" (Jason Hickel, 2019), it is essential to recall the "growth" it seeks to challenge and limit. The economy of nations, in its widespread applied understanding, is summed up by the total activities that contribute to producing services and goods that can be traded, sold, and consumed for financial returns. The size of the economy is measured by the GDP, which defines the total value of products and services produced by a country minus the imports of services and products. Therefore, the size of the economy is simply the size of production of all kinds minus the size of consumption of all kinds, which makes economic growth the increase in GDP over a given period. Growth is often viewed as the primary solution for economic and social issues. It is linked to generating job opportunities, attracting investment, balancing budget deficits, paying nations' debt, achieving higher wages, and, frankly, making everyone happy. This prompts a key question: how does this concept of growth impact public and green spaces, particularly in Minya?



The view from Minia's Corniche. The author, 2024.

The Nile Corniche in Minya molds the psychosocial wellbeing of the city, its greenery and openness is embedded in its collective memory and recreational capacity. When I first migrated to Cairo in search of better work and education, I had lost such an invaluable resource. Cairo is scarce of open green space. They are often hidden behind fences, obscuring their view, implying exclusivity and cost. I have experienced the value of public spaces when they became scarce. During my studies, I engaged in the research and literature that defines such spaces as a necessity and a human right. Human rights charters emphasize the importance of such spaces for individuals, the environment, and community well-being, especially in the face of climate and environmental changes.



The United Nations has acknowledged this right in what is known as the individual's right to access natural common spaces that have recreational and relaxative elements that enable social engagement without discrimination or any fees. Further, in the face of climate change, it has defined the individual's share of such spaces to 6 meters for every inhabitant of the city (2023). The individual's share of such spaces in Cairo is, alarmingly, estimated to stand at 0.15 square meters, according to El-Zaa'farany cited in HCSR (2022, p. 7). Such spaces, when lost, or become paid, sieged, privatised, or revamped into commercial spaces, the city (and its inhabitants) lose a considerable amount of their psychosocial wellbeing (Robil, 2017).



The reopening of Minia's Corniche after developments (Cabinet Facebook page, 2024)

Every few years, parts of Minya’s Nile Corniche is closed for “development”. Before reopening, rumours circulate that the Corniche will no longer be free and open to everyone—entry fees, ranging from one to twenty Egyptian pounds, depending on the storyteller, are mentioned. Such an amount is significant in a city where typical taxi fares in 2024 are between 10 and 15 pounds, despite three fuel price hikes in the same year (Al Arabiya, 2024)<sup>2</sup>. But the Corniche reopens, each time, free as always and accessible to everyone. Nevertheless, I can’t help but wonder: What if these rumours came true one time? What if the Corniche “grew” into something exclusive and gated? And where do these recurring rumours of “closure” and “privatization” originate? This article attempts to unpack these questions through the lens of “degrowth” that emerged in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## What if the Corniche was to “grow”?

The recurring rumours about entry fees for Minya’s Corniche raise valid questions: what if this space were to become a private, paid service? Or if it were allocated to businesses, cafes, and private resorts, fenced off like the northern hotels at the Corniche’s end? While this hasn’t happened, at least not yet, it reflects similar situations across Egypt, highlighting the value of accessible green

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2. In 2024, fuel prices rose to 17 EGP per liter for 95-octane gasoline, 15.25 EGP for 92-octane, and 13.75 EGP for 80-octane. Diesel and kerosene prices increased to 13.50 EGP per liter. Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly stated in July 2024 that petroleum product prices will continue to rise gradually through the end of 2025.



spaces and the risks posed by ongoing government “growth” and “privatization” policies. Many areas in Alexandria and Cairo have experienced rounds of privatization, “closure for development”, reopening with entry fees, or remaining closed to the public, serving only specific groups. These places, once public, are no longer for everyone.

Such occurrences can be understood within broader capitalist practices and privatization trends impacting Egypt’s cities since the economic liberalization of the 1970s, which has accelerated under World Bank conditions, including subsidy reductions and uncontrolled economic opening. Typically, spaces close under the guise of development, preparing the public for eventual entry fees or restricted access. Sometimes this involves symbolic closures or actual fencing to prevent free access and ensure exclusive enjoyment for those who can afford it.

According to Hickel (2019), a key proponent of degrowth, private capital enforces closures and fencing to serve an apparent notion and an underlying one. The apparent goal is for capitalism to extract value from nature to sell later. Resources previously available to everyone—such as open green spaces, the Nile and its scenic beauty, the mountains, or the sea in Alexandria’s Corniche—are no longer public. Instead, private capital claims them, reselling the same assets to the public for the profit of new owners, who act only

in favor of their private interests. The other notion is to manufacture “artificial scarcity.” When a resource is abundant, it does not yield lucrative returns; therefore, restricting access (or “thirsting the market,” as it’s called in Egypt’s economic parlance) controls supply to drive up demand and prices. In the scenario of Minya’s Corniche, this scarcity is manufactured by limiting access to peaceful, green riverside spaces with a view of the iconic plateau, parts of which have already been privatized by a major resort company (Housing Egypt, 2019).

## The growth of the Corniche of Alexandria

In a research paper by HCSR titled “Alexandria’s Corniche and the Right to Seaview”, maps illustrate the progression of urban intrusion and “privatization” along Alexandria’s Corniche over the past decade. As shown in Figures (1 and 2), urban development and private ownership have rapidly and aggressively claimed spaces that once belonged to city residents and tourists. Figure (3) demonstrates the degree to which establishments—cafés, clubs, hotels, and parking areas—comply with building standards that guarantee citizens the right to view the sea; only a small percentage of new developments adhere to these legal standards, which were established to ensure Alexandria’s residents retain visual access to the sea.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See other examples of enclosures and privatization of green natural open spaces in Cairo as the case of “Zohreyya Garden.”



Figure (1): Percentage of sea view in Alexandria in 2002 (HCSR, 2024)\*.  
 \*90% for sight, and 10% for no-sight or an obscured view

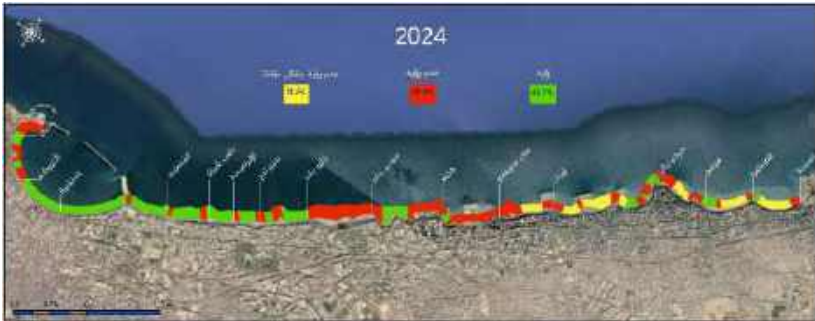


Figure (2): Percentages of sea view in Alexandria in 2024 (HCSR, 2024)\*\*.  
 \*\*45.7% for sea sight, 40% for no sight, and 13.7% for temporary no sight.

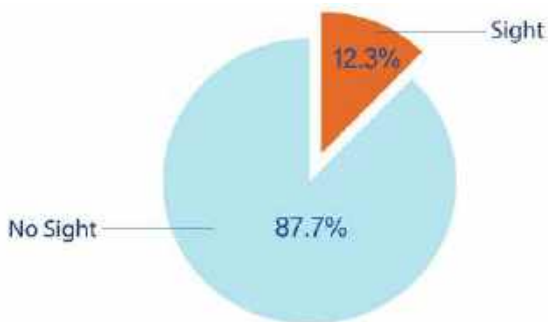


Figure (3): The percentage of Cafes, Clubs, Hotels, and Parking Services that uphold the "public see-sight" lawful standards (HCSR, 2024)\*  
 \*87.7% for no-sight (no upholding of standards) and 12.3% conform to the standards to ensure see-through.

## From where do the rumours originate? Or how do people resist?

Rumours often serve as collective resistance underlying the public's anxieties and obsessions, and serve as an early warning signal in the face of some perceived danger. In the case of rumours about privatizing Minya's Corniche, the concern is the potential loss of communal wellbeing, a shared amenity providing open and free access to the Nile. These fears are not without precedent: Egyptians have witnessed similar shifts in public spaces across major cities, where public access has become restricted or monetized. Privatization in cities like Alexandria exemplifies this trend, where parts of the Corniche have been closed or turned into commercial areas under the guise of "development", often at the expense of free access for city residents. Familiar scenarios include public buildings transformed into private hotels or public libraries converted into restricted associations, leaving residents with fewer free-of-charge accessible spaces for cultural and mental recreational activities. This pattern alters the concept of leisure and wellness, transforming it from an inclusive, open experience into a service with access limited to those who can afford it, impacting cities' landscapes, communal practices, and, of course, collective coping mechanisms.



During the recent temporary closure of the Minya Corniche for development, the city's residents had to temporarily redefine their concept of wellbeing and how they practiced it. Outings and strolls shifted to private spaces: cafes, cinemas, walking along the narrow sidewalk that is still open, and lingering in the northern parts of the Corniche that remained open. As such, the notion of wellbeing temporarily changed in a fashion similar to what degrowth addressed in its essence. In this case, wellbeing was altered to serve private gains and institutions, and payment became an integral part of the pursuit of wellness. This piece imagines a temporary closure to once become permanent fencing and privatization—at least for parts of what was once entirely public. At that point, the public would have to alter its concept of wellness and how it is practiced to maintain its connection to green spaces and water (be it the sea or the Nile). Naturally, the idea of wellness here shifts toward a growth-driven concept: paying for access to what was previously available for free. This illustrates one of the Degrowth thesis's arguments, which advocates for curbing growth and narrowing its scope to reverse this process, allowing each community to define wellness independently, free from the constraints of continuous growth, which depletes the environment and exacerbates social and economic disparities (Hickel, 2019)

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## **Before the Flood**

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Ganna Adel



## Before the Flood

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Tear down the house and build a boat.

Abandon wealth and seek living beings.

Spurn possessions and keep alive living beings

Tablet 11 of The Epic of Gilgamesh

Translated by Maureen Gallery Kovacs

[Electronic Edition by Wolf Carnahan, 1998](#)

The words of Ea—the god of rivers, wisdom, poetry, and the greatest advocate of humanity in the Sumerian pantheon—descend upon King Utnapishtim, son of Abar, one of the ancient kings of Iraq and the Sumerian counterpart to the prophet Noah. Ea warns him of an impending flood that will wipe out earth and everything upon it. The king does not concern himself with preaching or warning others. Right away, he obeys the command and survives. Through his survival, the world begins anew.

## What are we talking about when we talk about “de-growth”?

The discussion on the most suitable Arabic translation of "de-growth" stretches on for nearly two hours. We debate, weigh existing translations, strive for accuracy, and avoid, as best we can, terms with off-putting connotations. Should it be "deconstructing growth"? "Easing growth"?

"Directing growth"? This question occupied my mind for days before the discussion. Initially, I was inclined towards “lessening growth,” since it opposes excess, and the opposition in the degrowth movement—at least as I understand it—is against excessive growth, not growth itself. It is an open invitation to slow down, take a breath, and may be seek guidance from God.

As we debate further and read more, the concept becomes clearer: this movement indeed aims to halt growth in its search for a new model to lead economic activity moving forward. In light of this new understanding, I am inclined toward the term “no-growth,” and I have used it in the Arabic (and original version) of this article. There is no point in beating around the bush, the term in English relies on its jarring effect to spark debate and attract attention, even at the expense of its appeal. The discourse of degrowth, in its rawest form, seems like a call to abandon what we know,



possess, and use in order to create a new world. In a way, it echoes the ancient Sumerian god's call.

“And once the Great Alexander saw the breadth of his kingdom, he wept, for there were no worlds left to conquer.”

Degrowth divides the world into two camps: a Global North that has achieved aggressive growth rates and still strives for more, and a Global South that has not yet achieved such growth but is struggling to catch up with the North. As such, the degrowth discourse reminds us that current levels of growth were only possible through resource exploitation—whether by the North looting the South's wealth or by the North enclosing its own resources, depriving the majority of its people in favour of a privileged and dominant few. It also reminds us that limitless growth is no longer feasible, given climate changes that threaten humanity's very survival. In this sense, the degrowth movement poses an ultimatum to humanity as a whole about its own survival.

From this point, the discourse calls for the Global North to halt its growth, the Global South to stop its pursuit of growth, and humanity as a whole to distribute production (and excessive wealth) more justly and to envision new ways that redefine well-being and fulfilment outside of the paradigms that have led us all to the verge of a literal flood. In the Qur'anic version of the flood story, Noah spends



950 years warning his people of the impending disaster that is to come, only to be met with mockery and persistent denial. Even his son refuses to accept his calling, deciding instead to seek refuge on a mountain in hopes it would shield him from the flood and spare him the hardships of boarding the ark. The ark that would “reset” human civilization once again. In retrospect, this scenario seems almost inevitable; tales of extinction are not exactly appealing. Noah’s message was a hard one to swallow—such is the message of degrowth.

Capitalism promises you happiness, while degrowth squeals: “Do not dream of a happy world”.

Spend your best years in dehumanizing work conditions, cut down on your low-yield social systems, walk in as an individual to earn a handful of dollars, and let’s explore, collectively, your meaning of happiness in a commodity. Clothes? Cosmetics? Cars? Exotic vacations? An Instagram account overflowing with high-quality photos and millions of followers? Dating apps that digitize love and commodify sex? It’s all available for a price. Still unhappy? Perfectly natural. Pay hundreds of dollars for therapy sessions to sit with a stranger and complain about loneliness, anxiety, and lack of meaning. Still miserable? Excellent. Buy a course on the latest mindfulness and meditation techniques, or better yet, purchase a spiritual retreat to meet an ancient shaman in the Amazon who will take



you by the hand to meet God Himself, where you will be unveiled to the secrets of the universe and, of course, the root of your unhappiness—because your unhappiness, the problem, lies within you, naturally. That is capitalism’s promise—one it never manages to deliver yet, but one that it never fails to reproduce, rebrand, and use to funnel more human fuel into its relentless machine.

Opponents of the degrowth concept express fear of its application, warning of global, authoritarian policies around manufacturing, labour, energy use, and the limited margins of well-being it would leave for individuals and communities. These objections—though often exaggerated—do not lack validity. Degrowth, as an anti-capitalist philosophy at heart, dismantles the capitalist promise and calls on those harmed by it to imagine new, authentic visions of happiness. This is not merely about nervousness over a vague promise of a life we must first invent from scratch. Rather, it is about a genuine sense of injustice, a feeling that you have paid a high price for a life you will never get to live—because, if degrowth succeeds in its endeavours, that life will no longer be possible, neither in the South, nor the North, or anywhere else.

### **Does degrowth see the workers of the Sanmod textile factory?**

I think of the female workers at the Sanmod textile factory. They

are buying chicken on instalment after reaching an unprecedented level of extreme poverty. Some of them have been working at the factory for 17 years, earning a salary of 3,500 EGP—about \$72 per month. They recently completed a month-long strike, opposed by the factory management under state sponsorship, demanding the inactment of the minimum wage set at 6,000 EGP, or \$124 per month.

During the strike, four workers were arrested from their homes at dawn, still in their home clothes. An officer slapped the child of one of them when the child clung to his mother. They were forcibly disappeared for four days before reappearing at the prosecutor's office, where they were charged with a long list of accusations. One charge that stood out was "causing severe damage to the country's economic profile". They were released on bail of 1,000 EGP, only to discover they had been suspended from work due to the case. The workers have not received their wages for the last month they worked before the strike. They are now under strict surveillance, prohibited from contacting the press, and their case is subject to a complete media blackout.

In light of this, I wonder if the degrowth premise on "redefining welfare" is feasible. Degrowth calls on human societies—especially poorer ones—to redefine their true needs, away from deceptive capitalist constructs. While I fully agree with the premise, envi-



sioning new forms of well-being, prosperity, and a dignified life becomes nearly impossible under oppressive regimes that both create and perpetuate poverty. Especially when it all unfolds under the looming threat of a climate crisis, leaving individuals with little choice but to focus on daily survival and accept the world as it is rather than reimagining and restructuring it.

So many live by the breath of the crisis, their hands  
shaping its shadows into bread.

Mostafa Ibrahim, an Egyptian Poet

Degrowth is, perhaps, more challenging to “sell” to those who benefit the most from the current structures, whether in the Global North or South. These beneficiaries will never willingly relinquish their privileges. Much like Noah’s son, they will seek refuge on a mountain of wealth and privileges, shielded by laws and arms, to spend their remaining days in comfort and safety, far removed from the cries of the drowning.

Degrowth deconstructs the concept of scarcity, pointing decisively to the role of privatization and enclosure in stripping the commons and reintroducing them as commodities—a reality I do not need a climatetheorist to explain. In Cairo, for instance, the state replaces public amenities with cafés, wedding halls, and gas stations, turning natural activities, such as sitting on the grass, watching the sunset over the Nile, or just walking the lands of God into

paid services. Trees are arbitrarily cut down, commodifying green spaces themselves into spaces only accessible within gated communities sold at inflated prices. Profits flow into the accounts of construction companies, real estate developers, and their partners within key state positions. Subsidies on essential services—such as health and education—are lifted, creating artificial scarcity that forces people to run faster on the growth treadmill. In doing so, the state successfully nurtures a new class of allies loyal to the current status quo, defending its survival in relation to that of the current affairs—because, in many ways, they do go together. Does degrowth see these people? How does it address them? Does it bet on a sudden awakening of conscience—one that has ignored existing generations but will, by some miracle, care for generations yet to come?

### **Oh, C'mon, Shoot the Ball!**

I searched for the best Arabic translation of the word anticlimactic. I turned to Google—another capitalist giant I hope will one day disappear, yet I cannot imagine my life without—and, ironically, it suggests “against climate”. What a terrible translation and a pretty good joke.

I am looking for the word because it perfectly captures my overall impression of the degrowth discourse in its current form. It begins with a radical, revolutionary tone, aiming to dismantle the



world and rebuild it into something more just and humane. But the moment it lays out its vision for achieving this, it retreats into a cautious, shaky reformist stance—deeply frustrating. It runs the length of the field, dodging and weaving, placing the ball right in front of the goal only to not take the shot.

## **Fluidity that transcends nationalities**

The discourse of degrowth is based on the division of the world into a developed North and a striving South. It remains stuck in the idea of the nation-state as a unit that reflects the conditions of its population, their spheres of influence, and their benefit or harm from the current situation, and thus their role in its reform. This might seem valid if we only focus on carbon emissions and their relation to GDP (which is precisely what degrowth critiques and seeks to transcend entirely). But what about the disparities in privileges and the hierarchies of decision-making within a single region, country, or city? What about multinational corporations and the flow of capital between the North and the South? Where does Dubai, for instance, fit into this framework, and more importantly, where do the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and NATO stand? All of these are truly greater than the sum of their parts, as they represent economic and political forces that reproduce the world in its current form, govern poorer countries, direct their resources

to serve growth agendas, and transcend the notions of North and South or East and West, leading to a state of complete fluidity. It is a complex web of shared interests that goes beyond geography and nationality. Therefore, the degrowth discourse must embrace this very fluidity in what it proposes if it is to be truly radical. This entails, as a first step, demanding the alleviation of all debts of poor countries and liberating them from impoverishing policies and subsidy cuts that ensure their endless subjugation to growth agendas, and dismantling the IMF and the rest of its esteemed allies once and for all.

[In order to write poetry that is not political, I must listen to the birds.]

And in order to hear the birds, the warplanes must be silent.

– Marwan Makhoul, Palestinian Poet

What the IMF imposes is implemented—within poor countries themselves—under military dictatorships that suppress thought, creativity, and freedoms, and arrest, kill, or force their opponents into exile. Further, they prevent societal dialogue as before it emanates—anyone attempting to imagine an alternative world is “neutralized”. They may even go as far as igniting civil wars to facilitate the plunder of those countries’ resources, ensuring their own continued grip on power while also taking their commission on top of it—examples include Sudan and Congo. This is done with the help of weapons provided by major players to ensure the game contin-



ues. Therefore, we cannot talk seriously about degrowth without addressing disarmament. The issue of international disarmament must be placed at the heart of the degrowth discourse and at the top of its priorities if it is to have any real meaning. The arms industry and trade are the largest drivers of growth, and their eternal safety valve. What the ant of degrowth saves in a year is consumed by the weapons industry in a whim.

For months, Israel has threatened to use its nuclear arsenal to defend itself, with an ongoing genocide is taking place before everyone's eyes and ears, while decision-makers around the world have not even uttered a word to reprimand it. In fact, many—including philosophers, academics, and people we assumed were wise—have supported its “right to defend itself”. Talk about curbing growth and human imagination that would fairly redistribute the world's wealth and reconstitute a new world is not possible. Not in a world where a few continue to monopolize the decision of its destruction and threaten to unleash hell on earth—brazenly—whenever they see fit. At this point, even retrieving the story of the flood to mimic climate change in warning global powers capable of annihilating the world seems somewhat absurd; it more mimics Noah's warning his people of an impending flood, only for someone from the audience to smile and reveal a small button labelled “Start Flood”.





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## **The Gray Area**

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Shrouk Aly



## The Gray Area

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Everyone talks about the two extremes of the scale and how you must belong to one of those sides (the tip of the scale, black or white, socialist or capitalist...) but what about the middle? What about the passengers in the middle of the ship who belong to the Gray area?



I always pause at this photo and wonder about my place in it and my interpretation of it. It may seem like cages or evoke a sense of isolation. But in reality, it is for workers during the construction of a café complex on the Alexandria Corniche to block the view of the sea for millions of people who do not have the financial and social means to enter this complex. And my question always is: where am I in the photo?!

The first voice that echoes in my mind is “You’re in a valley, and I’m in a valley, and the dam between us is high” (El Morabba3 team, song “Ma 3andak Khabar”)

But the truth is, I do not feel a sense of belonging to any of those valleys. The truth is, I sympathize with the worker, and with the people angered by being deprived of their view of the sea, and at the same time, I am the person who will visit this café one day to meet their friends who are hanging out there. And I am always consumed by conflict: what am I supposed to do?

But where do those standing in the middle go?

I do not want to build for my grandchildren in the future, and live with the sense of guilty that they will have to bear my mistakes. And I do not want to bear the mistakes of my ancestors.



Is it possible that degrowth is a middle ground, a zone where everyone can relax, a place that allows them to pause for a moment and catch their breaths? Or will it be a new extreme and a new dam between a new valley, leaving these people adrift in the middle?





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# **Between Adaptation Challenges and the Philosophy of Degrowth**

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Mohamed Omar Taqi and Mahmoud Elsayed



## Between Adaptation Challenges and the Philosophy of Degrowth

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We live in an era where imagination has become reality, and what we once considered mere speculation we now experience and discuss, having lived through it for several years. The world has recently witnessed a significant momentum around issues of climate change and its impact on the planet. The phenomenon of climate change resulting from human activity is one of the most complex challenges facing the planet today. It leaves long-term imprints on the planet, a result of industrial accumulations spanning centuries, especially since the Industrial Revolution that witnessed an immersion in fossil fuel consumption. This has led to the accumulation of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane, which trap heat and increase temperatures. In response, countries have started taking action to hold conferences and agreements to reduce emissions, but the negative effects persist, ranging from droughts and floods to rising temperatures and biodiversity loss. The agriculture sector is one of the most affected by climate change<sup>4</sup>, as it primarily relies on nature with its multiple factors

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4- Mahmoud, M.A., 2017. «Impact of Climate Change on the Agricultural Sector in Egypt», in: Negm, A.M. (Ed.), *Conventional Water Resources and Agriculture in Egypt: The Handbook of Environmental Chemistry*. Springer International Publishing, Cham, pp. 213–227. [https://doi.org/10.1007/698\\_2017\\_48](https://doi.org/10.1007/698_2017_48)



including rainfall, temperatures, and winds, all directly impact agricultural activities. With accelerated climate change, this sector faces a significant challenge in ensuring global food security and preserving natural resources, which are threatened by excessive use and depletion.

Recently, the term or concept of “degrowth” has been circulated, which may seem new and shiny at first glance, but upon deeper reflection, it is apparent that it is closer to a revival of concepts that have long been extinct. Although the concept originates from the heart of the first world/ the Global North/ industrially-developed countries (similar to climate change), we need to delve deeper into the nature of using and shaping the concept according to our economic and social conditions, and its potential consolidation in the agricultural sector to solve its problems or more precisely, attempts to adapt to climate change.

Degrowth is a gelatinous concept that takes shape according to its surrounding environment like a chameleon. It can be termed as “Hidden Growth” (this is the term used in the original Arabic text) since it may not appear as growth at first glance, yet it actually represents a new form of growth. It signifies an economic and social concept that refers to reducing economic growth and consumption as part of a strategy to achieve environmental sustainability and social justice. It aims to reduce excessive resource consump-



tion and minimize the environmental impact resulting from excessive economic activity, while improving the quality of life and fairly distributing resources among all members of society. This concept transcends capitalism, which relies on incessant production and consumption, focusing instead on reducing excessive production and rationalizing consumption according to actual needs, aiming to achieve an ecological and social balance that restores prosperity to communities that have long suffered from the injustices of the capitalist system. It calls for a deep reevaluation of the global economic model, which has overlooked several important aspects.

The article is an attempt to unravel the philosophy of this concept and how it contributes to reducing global pollution and climate change that directly affect vital sectors such as agriculture, which locally and globally represents the cornerstone of food security<sup>5</sup>. In Egypt, the agriculture sector accounts for 20% of the GDP and provides employment opportunities for about 20% of the workforce<sup>6</sup>, according to World Bank data. With limited fertile lands, the ancient agricultural lands in the Nile Valley and Delta are shrinking due to pressures from the capitalist system that push for changing their patterns and building on them. Climate change exacerbates the challenges facing Egyptian farmers, who suffer from water

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5- Food security is the state in which all individuals at any given time have access to sufficient, nutritious and safe food that meets their nutritional needs and food preferences, while ensuring long-term sustainability.

6- The Egyptian Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) <https://idsc.gov.eg/News/details/17398>



scarcity and rising temperatures, impacting crop quality and productivity.

I am the authentic Egyptian farmer  
I am the son of the Delta and the Nile River  
I plant cotton, olives, and palm trees  
And reap goodness in a short time  
Listen to my story and what I am in

## Local Context:

### Firstly, the Farmer:

The Egyptian farmer narrates his story of water scarcity, as Egypt suffers from a severe water shortage due to limited resources and being below the water poverty line, where the individual's share of water is about 530 cubic meters, while the water poverty line is 1000 cubic meters per individual<sup>7</sup>. Farmers rely on the Nile River as the primary resource in addition to other resources such as recycled agricultural drainage water, groundwater, and low quantities of rainfall, providing around 80.5 billion cubic meters of water annually. However, this is not enough. Agriculture alone consumes about 61.5 billion cubic meters, and with climate change exacerbating droughts and floods, the water shortage crisis worsens, affecting soil quality and leading to salinization.

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7- The Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation



## **Secondly, Crops:**

Moreover, rising temperatures affect some crops such as wheat and tomatoes that cannot withstand excessive heat and incur losses, while the quality of other crops diminishes due to climate change. Changes in rainfall patterns also affect the agricultural plan of farmers who rely on rain to determine their planting schedules. In North Matrouh regions, which depend on rain for agriculture, the struggle for water intensifies as rainfall decreases. This challenge threatens food security, as crop prices rise, and some products disappear from markets. Farmers also feel the impacts of capitalism, which monopolizes markets and controls prices, increasing the suffering of lower-income groups. In addition to climate change, farmers feel they are in a constant struggle with an economic system that exploits them and negatively impacts their well-being.

## **Thirdly, Livestock:**

The cow, once a symbol of goodness and generosity in Egypt, also suffers from climate change. Higher temperatures affect its production, and its suffering worsens due to capitalism that requires constant production increase, leading to stress that affects its other functions. The scarcity of feed due to climate change adds to its suffering, as it competes with humans for food. This challenge puts



farmers in a difficult position between meeting the needs of livestock and ensuring their family's food security.

## **Will Degrowth Respond?**

In these circumstances, the concept of degrowth may appear as a resistance tool to the challenges posed by capitalism and climate change. This concept calls for reducing reliance on traditional economic growth that seeks infinite expansion and instead focuses on improving quality of life and its sustainability. Degrowth emphasizes reducing excessive production and overconsumption, as well as caring for the environment and local communities.

In the agricultural context, degrowth can help enhance agricultural sustainability by relying on clean energy and organic farming, and reducing the use of chemical pesticides. Some Egyptian farmers already exercise practices similar to degrowth, instinctively drawing on accumulated experiences. Some Egyptian farmers have been cooperating with shepherds for decades in an agricultural exchange process. The farmer plants the land for a season, and in the following season, leaves it to the shepherds, helping to naturally fertilize the land with sheep residues, and reducing the costs of preparing the land for the next agricultural season. This mutual cooperation between the farmer and the shepherd reflects one aspect of degrowth, where the farmer benefits one year and the



shepherd benefits the following year, without incurring significant losses or draining resources.

While degrowth attempts to offer innovative solutions to the challenges of climate change, there are potential drawbacks in its application, especially in developing countries suffering from food production shortages. Limiting agricultural production arbitrarily may exacerbate food security crises and threaten communities that rely mainly on agriculture and exchange their products<sup>8</sup> for other crops and agricultural products. This is in addition to the limited agricultural lands available in those countries. Therefore, degrowth should not be blindly or haphazardly applied, but rather strategic plans should be developed taking into account the needs of local communities and maintaining a balance between production and consumption without compromising food security.

For example, with attempts to redistribute agricultural lands in Egypt over the past decades, the intention was to achieve social justice. However, the lack of precise planning for implementation led to negative outcomes, such as the fragmentation of agricultural lands that adversely affected agricultural production. Hence, it is essential to learn from these past experiences: any new concept must be studied carefully and applied cautiously to ensure a bal-

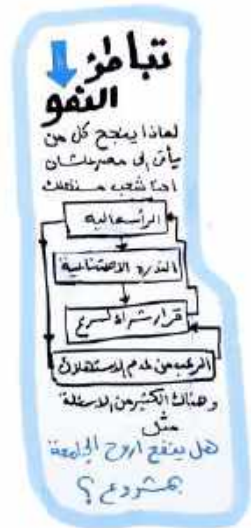
<sup>8</sup> The exchange of agricultural produce is the process of exchanging agricultural products produced by one party with agricultural products produced by another party. This process is also known as the “agricultural barter system”.



ance between economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social justice, while avoiding unintended consequences that may result from poor implementation.

In conclusion, adapting to climate change requires a rethinking of agricultural systems and the development of policies that support agricultural sustainability in the long term. By applying technology and innovation, enhancing international and community cooperation, a more implementable balance can be achieved between reducing carbon emissions and agricultural production sustainability. While degrowth may be part of the solution, its careful and flexible application will help address real challenges, ensure improved quality of life, and enhance food security for future generations.





# الانتقادات والجدل

## حول تفكيك النمو

تفكيك للاقتصاد

ولست  
زخرية

لا هدف  
لها  
حركة

طريقة عداله

دول النمو  
الريعي

الرفاهية

اعادة توزيع  
الثروة

هل  
يخلو عداله  
بين الدول

انما فعل  
ممن فعل

الارت لبتقاني

قائمة  
مخالفة  
قانونية

اجتبا  
دول الجنوب

الرجل الأبيض

وي فاجيه



لا حدود للرفاهية  
الجشع

انتا ابيض بتكلمين

دعا من يتكلم  
احمل الى تقعله



طرح الحكمة لشكله  
البيئة ليس طرح يتكلم

DEGRWIN  
Magic

# 2

Book Two:  
**Attempts at  
Understanding**

“Wait, let’s understand”

## **“Wait, let’s understand”**

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Participants attempted to present and explain the concept from their own perspective or as they understood it from their unique position. Initial discussions revolved around economic systems, beginning with the global capitalist system, and its evolution into a neoliberal system that deepened privatization and reinforced free markets, ushering in a new wave of economic dominance. With the evolution of the system, we delved into a more complex stage, where virtual currencies, digital economies, and financial innovations formed a tentacled structure for the global economy. Due to rapid economic changes and new complexities, it has become difficult for the average person to define the designations of these systems or understand their differences. Nevertheless, we decided to label all of these as “capitalism” because the fundamental principles of resource exploitation and wealth concentration remain intact. Writings addressed negative social and environmental impacts. Some participants focused on specific areas such as urban development, agriculture, and more. This general perspective did not overshadow the writings, and some turned to discuss specific impacts. Angry questions arose about how we were deprived of the



right to imagine post-capitalist futures, and how we even struggle to envision its end. As if questions were flying, we found answers to these inquiries in other writings about ourselves as products of this global system. How does the product attempt to dismantle and critique the producer?

“The global system does not see me” - Asmaa Hefnawy

(Participant)

One does not need several readings and discussions to realize the individuality of the experience. Many participants interacted inversely to scientific concepts, human issues, and global systems discussions, so they directly turned to writing about the self. Many wrote about their very personal daily practices and how they are affected and influence those big words everyone discusses. Some wrote about their forced migration experiences from their small, simple consumption-driven and productive cities to the centrally extended cities with bold fonts on Google Maps. They explored how this affected their lives and how some chose to return after arriving

(if there was an arrival at all). Some defined this return as a direct application of the concept of degrowth. This experience, although unique, was recurrent in many contributions. Others turned inward in their writings and looked at their daily consumption. One participant claimed to be able to flip Maslow's hierarchy upside down (imagine?) and rearrange it, thereby changing concepts of needs, consumption patterns, production, and GDP. Hence, discussions (and writings as well) took on a broader and more comprehensive perspective; the private cannot be separated from the public. Many discussed the concept of GDP and attempted to dismantle, deconstruct, and discuss alternative expressions of "progress". Writings that delved into the concept of personal and public welfare and how to define it emerged. What if concepts of welfare conflicted? How do we deconstruct and reconstruct concepts? If the solution lies in redefining growth, what is the new definition? Once we agree on the new definition, how do we apply it? This is where those ideas and discussions (and thus writings) intersected with how could humans produce deficiency.

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## **Will Growth be Moderate?**

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Asmaa Hefnawy



## Will Growth be Moderate?

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I do not claim to agree with all the ideas and proposals presented by degrowth (moderate growth). I will open with a set of questions that revolve around me as an individual in the economic and growth system: a girl and a rural citizen in northern Egypt in the Global South in the twenty-first century.

Where do I stand in the global system? What opportunities are available to me? What is my role in the urban system? And what is my potential and what actions can I take to change these systems?

The concept of degrowth aligns with much of what preceded us. Ancient Egyptian civilization was based on simplicity and the philosophy of eternal life; ancient Egyptians relied on a lifestyle that curbed excess and focused on the simple, using available resources such as mud bricks to build homes from surrounding environmental resources. Belief in the limited human life cycle made him renounce the idea of possession, which is the basis of the current economic system. Ancient Egyptians saw that their dwellings and needs should align with this cycle. When a someone dies, their house disappears with them, allowing future generations the op-

portunity for growth. With such perspective, growth and sustainability were achieved without violating the rights of future generations or depleting resources.

Therefore, I believe that this proposal is not new, but a kind of return to exploring authentic sciences and community legacies – or placing them in a “pre-machine” timeframe – where traditional societies were able to achieve degrowth and sustainable development naturally and without complication.

Returning to the roots, I see that my city, Sidi Salem in northern Delta Egypt with its rural origins, can embody what the movement proposes as a manifesto for the Global South. In my attempt to deconstruct this concept on a personal level, I seek to discuss the concept of prosperity in marginalized and distant small communities, and inquire about the unified meaning of prosperity for my society.

Life in my small village is simple, although the day is occupied with hard and routine work. Daily life centers around the movement of the sun from sunrise to sunset, starting from milking cows and buffalo and ending with field cultivation. However, despite this simplicity, people find happiness and contentment in their strong social relationships with each other and their environmental surroundings. The veranda has always been a place for happy daily activities. Recalling my childhood memories, the life of my aunt who



was also our neighbour clearly illustrates the concept of prosperity in these communities. Drinking afternoon tea in the veranda after a long and hard day's work was the true meaning of prosperity.

In my personal journey to explore prosperity from the perspective of a twenty-year-old girl within the global system, autumn 2015 marked my first experience living in the capital, Cairo. This was a new chapter in my life after graduating from university and studying architecture. I put in a lot of effort and research to find a job that suited my ideas and ambitions in my city or even the governorate I belong to. However, with the lack of justice and equitable development and resources distribution in remote areas, I could not find sufficient suitable opportunities for a girl like me from several perspectives (suitable salary, professional and intellectual development, or even what I can call harmless urban surplus – which it is not). My work as an engineer in Sidi Salem sometimes forced me to deal with construction on agricultural land in the midst of the rapid urban growth that Egypt is currently experiencing. Sidi Salem is among the cities undergoing chaotic and irrational urban development characterized by fragmentation and nonsensical dispersion – without considering the most basic human needs. It is a deafening urban mass in which everyone struggles to find a place for themselves at the expense of land and life. Believing in my ideas and what I have learned, and believing that the loss of

this land is unforgivable, the idea of going to Cairo and starting a new chapter of my life there was the solution at that moment, in an attempt to enter the global system and acquire skills, knowledge, prosperity, and money, expand my experience and engage with globalization. Initially, I went to continue my postgraduate studies, and later to work. I lived there for 4 years, gaining some of the experience I aspired to, but losing family stability, friends, and peace of mind, having to face the big city all by myself. It was a rich human experience for a twenty-year-old girl at the time, possessing skills, knowledge, and ambitions that qualified her to become part of this grand global economic system as portrayed to her. However, to be part of this system, you have to engage in a personal struggle with yourself, accept losing things in return for gaining others, and desire more that never ends. This is where many concepts and beliefs such as prosperity, happiness, contentment, quality of life, humanity, family, solitude, and stability intersect. Ultimately, I had to resolve this personal struggle with globalization and the global economic system.

Returning to repositioning and defining prosperity, where is Asmaa? Where is my place in the global system?

As an individual in the global system, I am very small, and I am sure the system does not think of me at all except in one case: numbers and figures, whether in the business world, politics, or social



statistics. However, as an individual, their importance in society as the foundation of communities – no, it doesn't see me at all.

I lived in a constant state of running where pausing is forbidden, or else the speed and globalization train will crush you. I am always compelled to be better, smarter, knowledgeable about everything, present at every event and activity related to my profession, or I will fall behind.

“And the one who distances himself from the field  
never appears in the photo”.

The photo I thought I was searching for my place in was professional ambition, seeking a social status and leaving the rural community because the global system has entrenched migration and displacement to the capitals without a real question about the value and necessity of moving towards the big city. Therefore, I made the decision to resolve this personal struggle with the global system in favor of my humanity from my perspective. I too will not see the global system, I will not race with it, I will not adopt concepts through it. I will adopt concepts through my own experience: happiness, prosperity, peace of mind, and wealth. I thus decided to return to my small town and found that I did not desire to have everything, I did not need to “have it all” and I did not have to be in the photo in such way.

And the pressing question always remains about the concept of contentment for me, what is the exact necessity I need? Will this really bring mental, emotional, and psychological comfort and prosperity? This question is repeated daily, in the midst of the overwhelming amount of available information, knowledge, activities, science, learning, and the desire for more and being present in all of this. Where does happiness and peace of mind lie?

To be fair, I cannot ignore the global system represented by technology and its role as a decision-making partner. Because of it, I was able to work again and communicate with the vast world from my small room in the marginalized small city in the far north of rural Egypt. I managed to overcome the depression that had haunted me for the past four years and before. The feeling of guilt for not running and chasing the train dissipated. I found a great deal of comfort and room for self-discovery and choice. Was having a job best for me or participation in events and social engagement? What kind of impact can I leave behind?

Therefore, it is essential to ask myself: can I be an example for others? Can individual salvation be collective salvation from the concept of the imposed vessels? If this concept or individual salvation for the community prevails, can Sidi Salem, Kafr El-Sheikh, Egypt, or the Global South survive the global rush? I do not have



a clear and definitive answer now, but the individual is the basic element of the community and its component, and from the concept of throwing a stone into stagnant water, change can occur.

This journey is not over yet; I have not completely left the race, as I am still in the game, living between two worlds, trying hard to find a balance between them, to be a part of this world without losing myself. Therefore, all I have done is an attempt to manage and control my position in this context. So far, I still work from home, earn a salary, communicate with the world through the small screen and the internet. I cannot imagine myself not working in my field or abandoning all my dreams and aspirations. This is what drove me to work on my startup company in an attempt to create a place or position that suits me within this global system.

Let us pause contemplatively at this photo that illustrates the intersections between the individual and the global system.

At the end of this personal journey, returning to the original and authentic concepts and definitions, I realized that the concepts of prosperity and happiness are a unique individual journey for each person. They are momentary feelings built on the time of occurrence, the quality of life, and the surrounding actions and activities. No one can monopolize happiness and prosperity, or establish

a unified concept that suits everyone. However, I believe that there is a common denominator among all of us, and that is the idea of searching for meaning and purpose in life.

And when I return to my childhood in my village in rural Egypt, I remember the simplicity of life and the happiness of people despite the scarcity of resources. In contrast, my experience in the big city taught me the true value of happiness, prosperity and personal development, but it also showed me the ugly face of this new global system. Today, I find myself at a crossroads, seeking a balance between my personal ambitions and my desire to live a more sustainable and conscious life. I realize that I cannot completely escape the global system, but I can choose how to interact with it.

I believe the solution lies in redefining success and well-being. Instead of chasing ideas dictated by the new global system, we can focus on building strong relationships, caring for ourselves and the surrounding environment, and contributing to our communities. In the end, my return to my small town was not just an escape, but a result of a journey of self-discovery. I learned that true happiness lies in simple things, living through genuine meanings, letting go of previous concepts, and upholding to the relationships we build with others. We are all responsible for building a more just and sustainable world for future generations. Here, the results of my experience intersect with the concept of degrowth.



## Positionality from the city's perspective

What is the position of Sidi Salem in terms of globalization and the global system? I feel that my individual situation reflects the city itself - the world and the global system only see this city through numbers, problems, and consumer goods. The question is: What are the development needs of this small agricultural and fishing local community? Is it just a market for consumption for food, goods, and services? What does this community produce?

Similar to many small towns, Sidi Salem was originally established as a center for administrative services, education, and distribution of goods and services to surrounding villages. Yet these needs have been changing over time. What are the limits of its potential now? What roles can it play in the future in the face of this rapidly changing system? How does it engage with it?

## Universities and local development

Kafr El-Sheikh University is a vivid example of this dilemma. The presence of many faculties does not necessarily mean achieving local development. If graduates of these faculties migrate to major cities in search of job opportunities after graduation like me, then what is the benefit of these universities? Shouldn't universities contribute to building our local communities and meeting their needs? Why burden the community and the local market with sci-

entific competencies that do not fit its needs?! Graduates are forced to leave their cities to seek resources in other cities and the cycle of chasing behind the global system train begins, where no one looks back at the vacuum created by the emigration of human resources from their original community, leading to increased pressure on the new community sought by the majority. Small towns would be empty and large cities congested, or empty regions and congested capitals. In both cases, societies, in all their diversity, lack the concept of degrowth, and are engulfed by the new global system.

### **Positionality from Egypt's perspective**

Based on the above, my questions arise: is Egypt compelled to follow the global system? What is its position and boundaries within this system? From my place here, I see that Egypt is indeed compelled to follow the system and be part of it in one way or another, but should it in its current form? Do we want to be a part of the global consumer production machine, or do we want to live a more sustainable life in balance with our environment and society? What kind of citizens do we want in the future? What position do we want for Egypt in the future? What does Egypt aspire to become?

Applying the concept of degrowth in our local context in the Global South requires rethinking our priorities, and our cultural, histori-



cal, and social identity, reassessing our lifestyle, and building more resilient communities capable of adapting to current and future challenges. It also involves redefining concepts from our own perspective.





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## **Is the Journey Really Individual or is it Capitalism?**

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Yara Wael Hegazy



## Is the Journey Really Individual or is it Capitalism?

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I can never imagine life before the rise of capitalism and the invention of other complex ideologies and long compound words that force humans to be mere cogs in the machine, another brick in the wall, or just an object not subject without the unlimited superhuman abilities and individuality that distinguish them from other beings made up of cells and atoms spinning in the universe alongside them (in a universe moving towards its own destruction and demise). Here comes the question: are humans destined for individuality and solitude, or do they belong to the earth, the environment, and the society around them?

Colonial systems exploited the strengths of Southern communities against them, where they were fundamentally built on interconnectedness, integration, and mutual reliance, driven by a fundamental goal: survival. Colonization asked, “what if there were not enough resources for everyone’s survival?” Thus, creating what is known as “enclosure”, which appeared in the Middle Ages in England when land was enclosed from the public, and people were prevented from accessing available resources without compensa-

tion as part of the ecosystem, thus creating a struggle for survival. This term is now used in critiquing capitalism, which forces the individual to try to survive on their own in a life-or-death race. When one is given the choice between their own survival and that of others, their survival instinct will be the sole winner.

Colonialism created what Jason Hickel expands on in his article “Degrowth: A Radical Critique of Capitalism”: artificial scarcity of resources to divide communities, weaken individuals for easier control, and push them to devote their lives to survival under its control. The more the individual approaches survival, striving to provide those resources for some comfort, or turns again to building a community that protects and shares their struggles, the more colonialism creates a new need for them and robs them of another right, so they never cease fearing annihilation.

So, it is colonialism and capitalism once again. Here, colonialism is not just meant in its old form. Our modern society is fundamentally built on competitiveness, transforming humans into machines that must evolve and learn not for the sake of discovery, communication, or even happiness, but for the purpose of obtaining their basic needs of clean water and some food products. If lucky, they will find a suitable shelter that enables them to survive for tomorrow and fulfil their role as a perceived effect.



Personally, I always feel there is no place for me here, I cannot find my position. I feel a constant pressure towards learning and knowledge, to the extent that it pushed me to learn things- completely by my own will, or may be the will that the system presented as the absolute truth - things I do not care about and will not care about in twenty years, but it is my feeling of the necessity of continuing my productivity. This became glaring in my life during the COVID-19 pandemic, which heightened my anxiety disorders because I never learned to stop. I am the product of capitalism. Since birth, I have been confined within the four walls, the shelter my family managed to provide at that time, despite its distance from their entire lives, as well as the nursery, school, university. These are all commodities, sold to me at a high price in the hope that one day, as another brick in the wall, I will be the one controlling my life. I will be able to wake up with the sunrise as I used to before productivity and 9-to-5 jobs stole it from me, and later quick investments and the dream of development.

This is what the Degrowth (comprehensive or integral growth as used in the original Arabic text) movement, wants to change. Proponents of this revolutionary idea argue that the solution lies in the community; where resources were originally available and distributed among community members according to their needs. However, artificial scarcity has stimulated consumer behavior and

the development of societies with the total spent by their individuals. The more an individual consumes, buying what they want and not what they need, the higher the overall growth rate. This leads to an unfair and unbalanced distribution of wealth, where one person owns a hundred houses and only inhabits a room, while millions are homeless. In Hickel's view, if all individuals receive fair and basic resources and services that match their needs and position by returning to their cultural and social heritage, balance will be achieved.

In the societies Hickel dreams of shaping, growth will be measured by the individual's well-being, in line with the community's definition. In such scenario, every individual receives community services that meet their basic needs, ensuring equality in food, health, and education, and everything that the community deems essential. Thus, individuals will not have to work 18 hours a day to meet those basic needs. As such, the individual's mental and physical health will improve, providing more job opportunities and eliminating the fear of unemployment.

I cannot lie and claim that I can give up everything I have in order to save the world. Nevertheless, the idea gives me some hope, even if it is the size of a small piece of microplastic that works to kill and poison me every day in various ways. But it is hope, because the



idea does not want to demolish the system all together; it does not criticize productivity but consumption and individualism. If the basic needs of the individual are made available fairly- unequally- to all communities in a manner that aligns with their heritage, beliefs, and the surrounding environment, resources will suffice, and we will give the Earth a chance to heal, breathe, and survive along with ourselves.





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**To Whom We Build Today?  
Deconstructing the Real Estate  
Cancer: Rising Necessity or  
Desired Luxury?**

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Hajar Al-Beltaji



## To Whom We Build Today? Deconstructing the Real Estate Cancer: Rising Necessity or Desired Luxury?

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Numerous theories and studies attempt to explain the historical development of cities, and how patterns of urban cities transformed through various stages of human development. In ancient times, cities emerged in an organic and natural fashion; without deliberate human intervention, cities were shaped by human needs and survival urges. Theories framed this form of evolution around the need for protection against danger, which later progressed with humanity's adoption of hunting and subsequently evolved further with the advent of agriculture.

Throughout history, cities evolved, taking into account the varying needs of their population, from the need to survive to the creation of civilization, wars, and conflicting interests that paved the way to the emanation of power dynamics. Subsequently, the Industrial Revolution marked a significant turning point in urban development, introducing new extents of urban expansion and construction that shifted urban development from basing its design on human need to being featured by commodification. Since then, the

urban landscape and architecture have evolved into aggressive expansions.

Initially, our cities resembled us in their intimacy. Their growth and evolution stemmed from their inhabitants, creating spaces (cities, towns, and villages) that mirrored and intersected with daily human lives, fulfilling their essential needs. I recall, as a five-year-old, visiting my village in rural Dakahlia, where locals would make bricks themselves and actively participate in every stage of building homes that felt warm and inviting—not just a shelter, but a space to belong.

Years passed, and when I returned to the village, I was appalled to see that gray cement had consumed the surrounding green agricultural lands. I believed it was a natural expansion aligned with the rising needs of the inhabitants of the village, driven by social and cultural factors compelling us toward the expansion of concrete. Then, I realized that this shift was also marked by the need to climb up the social ladder and satisfy other needs of education and status. Housing transformed from addressing the fundamental human need for shelter into a means of achieving social mobility and gratification.

In an alternate reality of Egypt, Cairo grew increasingly overcrowded, its residents stifled by the relentless congestion. Econom-



ic markets were opened up, ushering in a famous call to expand the urban city to areas far away from the congestion. Thus began the latest forms of commodifying cities through the construction of new cities and urban spaces that promise more luxury, new amenities, and more advanced housing, framing housing into new ways to achieve higher status, better wellbeing, and more innovative technology. First-, second-, third-, and fourth-generation cities emerged, with each new urban expansion competing to surpass the previous one in scale and allure. The race to own more properties became a new way to exact social and cultural capital.

Over the past decade, this real estate bubble has expanded at an alarming rate, to the point where my mornings are disrupted daily by relentless phone calls attempting to persuade me to buy or invest in more properties. These marketing calls invade every corner of my already crowded day. I often wonder, why is my day being intruded upon like this? If urban expansion was an urgent necessity, would it not naturally target those in urgent need? The aggressive cancerous growth of real estate is devouring everything in its path to offer more luxury and more social and class status for those who can afford it. This, in turn, fuels Egypt's capitalist machine, all while the Egyptian pound loses value with successive devaluations, creating misleading indicators of economic growth, particularly in the real estate sector.

Egypt's real estate and urban development markets feature a rapid expansion of capitalist production, consuming vast resources to further concentrate wealth in the hands of property developers. While in his degrowth thesis, Jason Hickel advocates for “radical abundance”, which cuts down the roots of the production of unnecessary goods. Of course, this discourse is problematic because then who determines what is necessary and what is not for the wellbeing of the people in the context of real estate markets? If you are the capitalist or property developer, it is about expanding profit margins. If you are among the less fortunate citizens, your hopes in life are simply to secure basic needs: healthcare, education, clothing, and shelter.

### **Hickel's Perspective and Degrowth**

Hickel advocated for degrowth as a way to achieve “radical abundance”, which emphasizes eliminating unnecessary production and focusing instead on meeting fundamental needs. Taking this to the context of Egypt's real estate market, degrowth can be viewed as an alternative model to curb the aggressive growth depleting natural, environmental, and social resources. Hickel calls for dethroning growth from being the ultimate goal and, instead, focusing on the equitable distribution of wealth and resources to ensure the well-being of everyone. This approach challenges the dominant



mindset in Egypt's market, which prioritizes constructing more properties to increase profits without addressing the deeper, systemic issues of inequality and environmental degradation.

Bringing degrowth back and applying it to Egypt's real estate markets, the proposition inevitably morphs into fierce opposition, requiring the enactment and enforcement of numerous laws and regulations to gradually curb the production of property. However, implementing such measurements within the current capitalist framework of the Egyptian economy, it seems particularly unlikely. Degrowth seems to directly oppose the principle of the accumulation of wealth that is so integral to capitalism.

Observing from a distance, one sees the intricate interplay of capital, vested interests, and the overlapping agendas of powerful capitalists and their organizations. How can this system be disrupted and dismantled? While change from within might seem plausible, it borders on wishful thinking. That being said, one could revisit the foundational principles of city-building: justice in housing distribution, diversity, and democracy, as per Fainstein (2014). Degrowth in the real estate market must, therefore, begin with decommodifying housing, placing restrictions on real estate ownership (Mete, 2022).

Using game theory or probability scenarios, one possibility suggests reframing housing as a necessity rather than a tool for profit and wealth accumulation. Degrowth in real estate could leverage cooperatives and shared housing models to improve accessibility and affordability. Returning to pre-commodification practices, we could focus on redistributing housing and enhancing affordability. Though challenging, this scenario requires robust political will and societal solidarity. For architects, for example, priorities could shift toward promoting shared and adaptable housing solutions. Historically, before the urban cancer of unchecked expansion, our communities offered various models of shared and family-oriented housing.

Modern communication technologies, such as the Internet, can play a pivotal role in advancing shared housing as an innovative solution for equitable and humane living spaces. Instead of pursuing the endless accumulation of property, degrowth could prioritize dismantling the current framework and providing genuine solutions for the majority—those who lack access to affordable housing in overpriced and exclusive urban areas.

In other spaces, the cancerous sprawl of real estate manifests as a constant tug-of-war between what we truly need and what the wealthiest desire to possess. I fiercely wrestle with my need to sim-



ply exist, while my fellow inhabitants of this land insist on their relentless pursuit of greater heights and dominance. Amid this conflict, I propose a model that mirrors all potential scenarios for every individual involved. In the dismantling and slowing down of this malignant urban expansion, voices continue to rise, urging us to transcend our desires for excess and luxury. They call on us to return together to our roots, to our land, whole and reconciled.





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# **Consumer Behaviour and Artificial Scarcity: Is the Egyptian a Consumer by Nature!**

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Asmaa Mahmoud Abdo



## Consumer Behaviour and Artificial Scarcity: Is the Egyptian a Consumer by Nature!

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Have you ever thought that anyone who ventures into entrepreneurship or free trade in Egypt succeeds, or is this just personal speculation? I was struck by a piece of news I read (as far as I remember) that PepsiCo's profits in 2021 increased by 600% during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In an attempt to understand how people can thrive amidst global and local crises, such as climate change or economic crises, I wondered: is the issue linked to the local Egyptian situation or is it broader than that? At first glance, I lean towards a hypothesis and exploring it through a simple research sample, then we can engage in attempts to answer it. My assumption simply put: Egypt is a consumer state, and its people's culture is a culture of pure consumption. However, consumption in Egypt has changed significantly due to various factors.

Here, we can link consumer behaviour to artificial scarcity as dis-

cussed by Jason Hickel in his critique of the current economic situation, and we can also try to explore their relationship with de-growth (growth slowdown).

## Factors of Consumer Behaviours

As defined by marketing sciences, consumer behaviours refer to the patterns and decisions individuals make when purchasing goods and services and using them. These behaviours are influenced by several factors including economic, psychological, social, and cultural factors. Understanding these behaviours helps companies and institutions develop successful marketing strategies that are promoted as meeting consumer needs, while their main goal is to achieve greater profit and market expansion.

Consumer behaviours are divided into four types:

1. **Rational Behaviour:** When the consumer makes a purchasing decision based on logical and realistic analysis, such as price comparison and product quality.
2. **Impulse Behaviour:** When the consumer buys something without prior planning, often due to sudden psychological or marketing influences (such as offers and discounts).
3. **Recreational Behaviour:** The consumer focuses more on experi-



ences and entertainment than the practical value of the product (such as travel or dining in fancy restaurants).

4. Environmental Behaviour: The consumer focuses on environment-friendly and sustainable products, driven by environmental or social awareness.

Influencing factors in these behaviours include:

- Cultural: Values and traditions influence consumer choices. In some cultures, priority is given to the family over individual needs.
- Social: Influences from friends, family, and society.
- Psychological: Personal motives such as needs, desires, and emotions.
- Economic: Personal income and wealth.
- Technological: E-commerce and digital platforms have facilitated access to information and product comparison.

### Artificial Scarcity: A Tool to Enhance Consumption

Scarcity, at its core, is a tool used to enhance the need and stimulate consumption behaviours. In marketing, scarcity is employed to create a sense that the product or service is rare or unique and close to depletion, prompting consumers to make quick purchasing

decisions. This approach not only stimulates consumer behaviours and boosts sales but also deepens capitalism's penetration into our daily lives.

At the macroeconomic level, scarcity is not always the result of a real resource shortage, but often an artificial condition produced by capitalism to maintain the continuity of its system. Despite productivity surpassing the point of achieving material abundance, its gains do not translate into reduced working hours or improved wages. On the contrary, productivity is used to deepen the gap between classes and increase capitalists' profits, while keeping the spectre of unemployment alive to force workers to adhere to high productivity levels.

## **The Impact of Artificial Scarcity on Our Daily Lives**

Some common examples of artificial scarcity include:

1. **Production or supply restrictions:** intentionally reducing the production of certain products to increase demand.
2. **Access control:** imposing restrictions on access to specific resources or information.
3. **Overpricing:** raising prices to make products appear scarce.

This impact is clearly evident in the products we consume daily,



for example:

- Hyaluronic Acid: a product that attracts women out of fear of aging.
- Home exercise equipment: marketed based on the fear of mobility limitations with age.
- Personal car: a status symbol, despite alternatives such as public transportation.

## **The Relationship Between Degrowth and Artificial Scarcity**

Degrowth is a concept that calls for reducing industries to achieve environmental and social goals, such as reducing harmful emissions and environmental pollution. However, in a system that perpetuates artificial scarcity, this idea becomes almost impossible. Capitalism creates a constant need for consumption and reinforces polluting consumption patterns.

## **Egyptian Consumption Patterns: Practical Examples**

The difference in lifestyle between governorates affects consumer behavior. Through a simple survey:

- Cairo:
  - Ganna: Talabat (delivery app), as an alternative to tradi-

tional shopping.

- Rodaina: microwave oven, as an alternative to regular ovens.
- Taqi: smartwatch, as an alternative to regular watches.
- Alexandria:
  - Heba: paper books, as an alternative to e-books.
  - Eman: personal car, as an alternative to public transportation.
  - Hana: expensive skin creams, as an alternative to natural products.

Life in Cairo and Alexandria is fast-paced and dynamic, which accelerates consumption. As an Egyptian resident in Alexandria, I see that applying degrowth in Egypt is nearly impossible due to capitalism's control. However, there is hope for gradually changing the people's culture.

Individuals who are producers are less affected by inflation than the consumers. Therefore, we have to start changing our way of thinking about consumption and adopt more sustainable lifestyles.



**لمن البناء اليوم؟**

السرطان العقازى وارتداء على المنأخ هل فتأخ لهذا الكرم عن التسوع العراق؟؟؟ التطور العراق

حفاة - حرمة - المتعلمون

**التورة السناوية**

- \* تسبع الطو القضاة
- \* حفاةم جيون هكك في نككك التور



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# **An Attempt to Reclaim the Right to Imagine: Degrowth and Capitalist Realism**

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Rodaina Khaled



## An Attempt to Reclaim the Right to Imagine: Degrowth and Capitalist Realism

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“What we are dealing with now is not the incorporation of materials that previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but instead, their precorporation: the preemptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations, and hopes by capitalist culture”.<sup>9</sup>

In the first chapter of *Capitalist Realism*, titled “It’s easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” Mark Fisher argues that contemporary capitalism—that is, capitalism in its current stage—deliberately limits and confines the scope of imagination, preemptively suppressing the emergence of ideas that could challenge or oppose the existing status quo, that is, the system, rather than waiting for subversive thoughts to emerge and then neutralize them. Capitalism proactively dominates the birthplace of thought, ensuring that individuals and collectives succumb to the overwhelming sense of injustice while it also perpetuates a more dangerous feeling: the helplessness that emanates from the futility of imagining alternate scenarios. By monopolizing the imaginative space, capitalism fortifies itself against critique,

9• Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, P. 16.

perpetuating the idea that it is not just the dominant system but the only conceivable one.

Indeed, we are living in the era of unprecedented environmental degradation—both in its physical and human dimensions—to achieve individual luxurious comfort and relentlessly pursue limitless economic growth. Wealth accumulates disproportionately in the hands of a few elites at the expense of the majority, by extortion or by monopolizing the fruit of such relentless growth. Available natural resources are exploited while cheap human labour is extorted without accounting for the finitude of the natural resources nor the human rights of labour. Such mindless depletion poses a severe threat to all forms of life on earth. As for human resources, there is scant consideration for basic human rights outside the geographic boundaries of industrialized, primarily northern, nations or for individuals outside the class structures benefiting from this exploitative model within those same nations.

The marginalized groups affected by this exploitative system often await their demise, either through the direct plundering of their resources or by being enslaved in so-called “factories” of injustice in their own countries. These factories provide neither financial security nor health insurance in accordance with their hard work for most of the day to produce cheap commodities in relation to



their consumption rate, commodities that were never “cheap” for their producers for it costs them their health, well-being, time, and sometimes, souls, as was the case for a quick-fashion factory in Bangladesh in 2013<sup>10</sup>. Alternatively, lives are lost to bullets and bombs paid for by tax money of the northern state populations. Lives are also lost to the intensifying environmental disasters such as the Derna disaster of 2023<sup>11</sup>, exacerbated by the failure of southern states to adequately prepare or mitigate disasters. Such failures often stem from internal corrupt governments, the lingering of colonialism or neo-imperialism, or maybe a combination of both. Notably, the contribution of southern states to climate change amounts to mere fractions of the levels contributed by the so-called developed nations. Yet, southern states bear the brunt of the consequences caused by climate change and environmental degradation.

Southern states are also often dependent on their historical colonizer(s), as is the case with some African countries and France. In other cases, its more complicated—nations are ruled by local dictatorships and fascist regimes that work to safeguard the interests of former or new colonial powers while, of course, securing a slice of the cake for themselves and their families. A third scenario in that regard is what is seen in many nations in South Ameri-

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10· [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rana\\_Plaza\\_collapse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rana_Plaza_collapse)

11· <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/09/1140892>

ca, where military coups on democratic regimes, even ones aligned with white values, are supported by external powers before democracies emanate or achieve the slightest of social reforms.

## **A Way Forward?**

In an attempt to break free from the vicious cycles of injustice and exploitation, some theorists propose the concept of degrowth (I use degrowth in the original Arabic texts because it underlines deconstruction rather than a rigid solution), a critical perspective on excessive economic growth that focuses on rethinking its foundations and impacts. It aligns with my inquiry into deconstructing the growth we know rather than rushing to assert definitive solutions to our predicament.

Degrowth is critical enough to challenge the soaring and limitless economic growth of producing countries, especially those in the Global North. It also challenges frameworks of consumption that base their surpluses on the unrestrained exploitation of human and environmental resources. Finally, it contests consumption that is based on artificial scarcity and delusioned class upward mobility rather than on actual needs and necessities. All reasons and frameworks have their catastrophic impact on social justice and ecological systems.



Degrowth advocates argue for curbing the growth and consumption rates of developing nations first, which could reduce the excessive pressure and demand for more resources to allow developing nations a wider space in achieving adequate growth levels in accordance with their own definition and cultural notions of wellbeing, instead of adopting a homogenized concept of wellbeing perpetuated by neocolonial systems. That notion of wellbeing, based on class mobility, endless consumption, and limitless economic growth, should become obsolete given its delirium to the current climactic and environmental affairs that it is causing. Nonetheless, it does not leave leeway for individual nations to imagine and practice their own definition of wellbeing and pursue independent trajectories of governance and sovereignty, even in theoretical terms. This article looks at degrowth from the point of view of developing nations and countries with lower income rates and less GDP per capita—also known as the Global South.

For those of us in developing nations, critical questions emerge: how can we implement degrowth within local contexts? What cultural heritage can we draw upon to guide this transition? What about communities that have been deprived of access to this heritage? And finally, even if industrial nations halt their growth, would we truly be free to chart our own course, or merely remain vast reservoirs of resources for global consumption?

This piece came as reflection output to discussion circles held about degrowth and urban activity. We delved into various aspects of the concept, starting with the term itself. Then, the impact of linguistics and what could be lost in translation of “degrowth” took centre stage, dominating much of the conversations. Our discussions gradually unfolded into attempts at achieving adequate positionality within and in relation to the degrowth thesis. Recognizing that we are all citizens of plundered nations, positionalities branched out, influenced by our divergent cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Observing our positionalities proved useful in discerning our understandings and interpretations of degrowth. It was interesting that our conversations had boiled down into inquiries about the essence of value and the criteria by which growth is measured (e.g., GDP), which do not reflect the reality of different social, educational, and political macro-indicators. Inquiries were rather, also, fearful. Some wondered of the worth of imagining alternate scenarios, anxiously pondering whether the success of the Global South’s policies will still depend on the Global North even after the North had successfully curbed their growth ratios. We, the people of the Global South, are assured countless times that our lives do not matter and that our value is merely of value, especially when global crises



occur; take COVID-19 and the crisis of vaccines<sup>12</sup>, for instance.

I could not help but relate the anxieties, fears, and inquiries that have arisen in the discussions to what Fisher once maintained about capitalism's curbing the imagination of its subjects. Through devoiding the imagination of its intrinsic meaning and value, after one is detached from their issues and concerns to the role of the spectator in their very own life, it becomes futile to imagine, let alone to actively engaging in shaping their trajectory. Fisher (2009) maintains:

Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics. Yet this turn from belief to aesthetics, from engagement to spectatorship, is held to be one of the virtues of capitalist realism. In claiming, as Badiou puts it, to have 'delivered us from the "fatal abstractions" inspired by the "ideologies of the past," capitalist realism presents itself as a shield protecting us from the perils posed by belief itself. The attitude of ironic distance proper to postmodern capitalism is supposed to immunize us

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12- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00281-023-00998-0#Sec2>

against the seductions of fanaticism. Lowering our expectations, we are told, is a small price to pay for being protected from terror and totalitarianism.<sup>13</sup>

Personally, I am yet to arrive at a complete comprehension of degrowth and its localization to my contexts and those of the Global South. However, I can tell, observing the gazes of my peers and their sentiments in the discussions, that it is critical to start by reclaiming our right to imagine an alternative before delving into debating solutions and alternate global trajectories. Restoring our once-robbed imagination is, in itself, the most revolutionary step we can take along the path. This is crystalized by considering the privilege that enabled us (me and my peers) to engage and participate in such a circle. Higher education—now commodified rather than recognized as a right—along with the physical and financial capabilities, as well as the luxury of time and space that we could pose to engage in such discussions, are all privileges that most people in the Global South are stripped of. Most citizens of the Global South are forced into a constant struggle for their survival, unable to think beyond securing their monthly rent or even a single meal for the day. In that sense, my privileged positionality does not include the luxury of surrender nor despair. It is a necessity to hold the lines and confront the hegemonous system. It is the very least

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13- Mark Fisher, 2009, *Capitalist Realism*, Pp. 5- 6.



we can do—a necessity and a duty that our positionality mandates.

Lastly, I would consider myself a deserter if I find myself drowning in the defeatism and nihilism granted to me as margins of privilege after I have secured enough of my basic needs. I do not wake up to the sounds of bombings or reconnaissance drones—at best—or to the biting cold of winter slicing through my bones like a saw, just as the winds tear through my tent, or to a house swallowed by floodwaters, much like how climate change brings waves of displacement, destruction, and loss to countless of our afflicted communities. I see giving in to nihilism—one of the coping mechanisms—as an attempt at individual survival, which is, as Frantz Fanon puts it, a faithless form of safety. While I firmly believe that engaging in organized work, particularly on a local level, to confront environmental changes and the systems driving them is the clearest and most effective way to break free from the shackles of nihilism and liberate imagination from the prison of “realism”, I also recognize the necessity of turning to friends and companions, as I like to imagine them, from all walks of life—especially the artistic and literary circles—to pull myself out of this state. I recall Mashrou’ Leila’s “Wa Nueid, and we repeat” as a song empowering for my reclaiming my right to imagine<sup>14</sup>:

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14- Translation derived from Betül Beyazyüz’s (2021) translation of the lyrics on YouTube. Original song by Mashrou’ Leila. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWk8E13pzcA>

We can wait for dawn until we finish counting the stars

And repeat, repeat, repeat

We can carry the rocks over the mountain and throw them  
down

And repeat, repeat, repeat

We can open our eyes when they throw dust into them

Tell them we can still see

We can refuse to eat each other, even if the people saw our  
bones

Tell them we are not hungry

We can shake to collapse the cage that we have been

Tell me, what are we afraid of?

We can resist to demolish the ghost that we have fought

Tell them we are still standing

We can soar, we can fly, when we accept to crawl

If we can stand the winter, spring is meant to come

Tell we are still standing.

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# تطبيقات ونماذج عمارة



فئة تجارب  
التوثيق  
للتطبيق  
للتطوير

تطبيق النمو  
مش في مهربس

انضام المدن  
البريدية مثل الخلية  
السطانية

الإحلال الطبقي

توزيع غير عادل  
للموارد

10% من سكان القاهرة  
تم زولهم

40% CO<sub>2</sub>  
انبعاثات كربونية

التوزيع الجغرافي  
محتد على  
المنتجات  
عملية لاسفت  
8%

QNET



الفر التقليدي



اعادة الاستخدام  
المبني  
مثل خزانة المياه  
واعادة استعمال

استخدام خدمات  
معد تدوير من البيئة  
مثل الطين والبلاستيك

المشاركة  
الشعبية

التوكية

يمكن وفتح  
مبادرات للدولة  
حل المشكلات

يجب استخدام  
فكر الاستدامة  
في المدن الجديدة





# 3

Book Three:  
**Attempts at  
Implementation**

“ Et Maintenant? A Totalitarian  
Regime Disguised!”

## “Et Maintenant? A Totalitarian Regime Disguised!”

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Some participants attempted to move beyond discussions of concepts and analysis and jump straight into application. Surely, we all desire this beautiful thing, the utopian dream. But now we are trying to reach it from within another existing and effective system in which humans have lived, resisted, and thrived for centuries. Some saw the solution (once again) as individual, believing that by simply changing some individual behaviours and daily life decisions, the system could change. In other words, if everyone returned to their village and worked on their community and its development, or if each person reduced their consumption rates, goodness and peace would prevail on Earth. In the same vein, some believed that the solution lay in relinquishing some personal privileges for a better life for all.

Others viewed these ideas as dreams that neither satisfy nor alleviate hunger, so they turned to practical solutions that could be implemented within the current system and could potentially form the nucleus of another system: cooperatives, for example, a solution for democratizing the means of production and thereby enabling



real change. Here, the famous debate subtly emerges between the writings that discussed implementation: do we burn down this city and rebuild a better one? Or do we deconstruct the city and rebuild it building by building? Legitimate and recurring questions, but the crucial question in the discussions becomes evident here: will this change be costless?

“And we repeat, and we repeat, and we repeat...”

- A song by Mashrou' Leila band

Speaking of the cost of change, several participants revisited the prices paid in past attempts at change, still engraved in our collective memory as children of that period and children of this Global System. What is the cost of change? More importantly, who will pay it? And if we all pay, will we pay equally? In reality, negotiations at climate change conferences (COP) do not bode well.

Several writings and discussions tackled this question. Many agreed that the cost would not be simple. Capitalism is not this benevolent creature that will not strive for survival (as it has done



in the past whenever it faced a crisis that was its own making to begin with). Is this a struggle between capitalism and nature? Or is it a struggle between capitalism and its victims? Will our fate be isolation, with scattered groups of “degrowers” on this planet that will remain subject to the same capitalist system? It seems that we still find it difficult to envision tranquillity after the storm. It seems that the plane has not yet landed, and the birds are not here to begin with.

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## رسالة المهتم



- 1 رسالة رقم واحد إلى تجميع الضر  
اصبح العالم اسفل مع AI و Devops  
الناس أصبحت عداد جما جدا
- 2 الف رسالة لاولي لعالم اصبح  
أكثر تعاشه وينتفع من الل



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## **The Hoopoe's Letters**

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Soliman Hossam



## The Hoopoe's Letters

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### First Letter

To my beloved friends,

To that safe space,

To the people of the Urban Lab Camp,

and to Degrowth,

Greetings,

I am writing to you from this place and from a new era, after life has calmed down. We have broken down the enclosure policies and expanded our presence in margins beyond capitalism. Human greed is no longer our main driver, and no one seeks to own the biggest sum of money, build the largest buildings, or even have as many children. The world cantered on insatiable human greed has been defeated.

I had left our beloved Egypt for quite some time, moving from one space to another and from one Climate Summit (COP) to another,

fighting for me and for this sad world. We almost lost hope, until Mother Nature responded to us and the scales were tipped up. I returned to Egypt and spent the quietest and happiest days of my life, seeing everyone here enjoying life together for the first time since my childhood.

Year after year, I see prosperity shown on Egyptians' faces. We finally have the right to education, relaxation and expression, a collective space for change. I envy my younger brother and the younger generation for having this wonderful opportunity to feel alive. I am also very grateful to have been part of this journey as a sufferer, observer and fighter, especially after arrival.

Our lives are now easier as the world thinks how to use AI to help the world survive. The internet is really fascinating. Can you imagine that traffic has become quieter, and that water has become available? Finally, the concept of radical abundance – which I had not yet understood, was realized. I argue that had it not been for the use of these technologies, we would not have been able to reach this point. I also argue that if all the technologies and facilities existed, we would not have reached here without our determination to change. I am really grateful for being able to sip my coffee and that it will not go extinct as we were told earlier.



The feeling of sadness fills me that it took us so long to get to this.

It also cost us a lot of time from those we love; we lost some friends during this trip, and we lost the wonderful spaces I have always loved from Alexandria.

But we are fine.

Best Wishes,

Soliman; your favourite hoopoe

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## Second Letter

I write because I feel alienated again.

To capitalism, climate change, international banks and their friends,

You are not welcomed. I wish you just perish!

You managed to make the air of life strain me after the movement accelerated and the race returned to what it was. We run and run and I see that road endlessly. Here are the faces that I have always felt strange next to: "we are all here miserable and wounded enough, so do not try to fool me with hope."

What did we do wrong? Why did not it work? Why?

Did we rush? Have we taken the wrong path? Or was it an illusion from the beginning? Is jungle life the only life known to this planet?

It seems that the only language that the world understands is the language of power and authority.

I wished there was some way I could go back in time and join my friends who were determined that the concept of degrowth as we understood was unattainable. I would have been determined to have power and authority. I would have spent this lifetime striving to gain as much power as possible. I would have embraced capitalism to the fullest. I would have followed the same sordid methods as the other side until my chance of world domination came. The only difference between me and them is the intention with which these heinous crimes are carried out. My methodology would have been to prove that I am the strongest to be heard, not because I am afraid of the control of another party who can plunder me.

We thought that we had already won them, but the truth is that they pretended they got along— similar to what they always do — so that they could control us and loot us again.

Our dream was peace for all. Their dream was destruction for all who were not among them, and indeed for all those who were among them and did not collude with them.



In conclusion, here I assure you that fire is for fire even for the least evil party.

With all my hatred,

Your opponent Soliman  
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### Third Letter

The magic recipe for degrowth

To my friends who are engaged with public affairs,

And to those who are on the verge of losing hope

I would like to assure you that the question of what is the solution continues to concern me day and night.

I think the solution is change. It is we who need change, not the environment. We decide the change and we start it. Well, isn't degrowth a change?

I believe that degrowth is a needed and wonderful change, and therefore will succeed in achieving what we dream of: a real stable life with space for happiness that is not artificial or polluted. But, as I described in the letter, it is only a temporary solution unless power remains in the hands of those who love life for all. This will only be achieved if there is a sustained collective awareness of the

dangers of rapid economic growth and considering the need of all, not only some humans.

And thus, we have to make sure that as we seek to plant our seeds, we must be seen by all and that we help them plant their seeds, hoping to show them the truth of the matter, the fact that one is for all and all is for one.

Let me tell you the recipe, grab a pen and paper to take notes.

The first step is inevitably to know the language of a people in order to secure their evil; that is we must understand well the methodology of the other side and the mechanisms of its sustainability as a tyrant.

The second step is to gain sufficient power to gain authority.

The third step is to determine how we can be sustainable at the top, to make sure that there is something to ensure the sustainability of public awareness to ensure that they withstand the authoritarian human nature. We need an overwhelming defence system for every new case of fox and snake.

I hope we reach a solution together.

Sincerity,

Soliman

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## **The Right to Degrowth?**

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Safaa Yousef



## The Right to Degrowth?

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I am the citizen living in the Global South, constrained by the concepts imposed by the Global North regarding progress and prosperity. I exist as a consumer citizen, entirely reliant on what others produce. I participate in increasing the capital of the factory owner and large-scale production. What power do I possess to make decisions regarding my growth, well-being, and my ability to survive? I have become a cog in the wheels of this system.

Honestly, I do not know when I can break the constraints imposed on my mind, which I have come to realize are somewhat illusory. After closely observing others who have decided to break free from constraints and managed to create an alternative reality, I realized that they are normal individuals. Their wealth is not measured in gold or money, but in those moments when they feel the breeze passing through the planted fields in that vast expanse, or in watching and waiting for that seed to come to life under the sun's rays. They are deeply-rooted individuals, like tree roots saturated with deeper meanings, refining their abilities of patience

and adaptability to change. It seems that persevering in polishing these abilities is the key to life.

It seems that in order to reach the destination we desire, we must strip away some privileges of this system so we can achieve our aspirations. But do we possess privilege in the first place, or is it a continuous illusion resulting from the constraints we have accepted? Do we set aside our own definitions that suit us in terms of progress and prosperity, or do we immerse ourselves in others' experiences in the hope of finding a narrative different from the one imposed on us, a narrative we can truly belong to?

The concept of “radical abundance” as I understand it, is a call to reduce excessive consumption and production as a means to address economic, social, and environmental challenges, placing humans at the heart of the economic system rather than just being influenced by it. In my reading of radical abundance, Jason Hickel sees a need to abandon traditional economic growth and reduce the material consumption imposed by current economic systems as a necessity. The focus should be on improving individuals' and communities' quality of life rather than solely focusing on economic profit and wealth accumulation, by distributing available resources and wealth fairly to achieve social justice. This would require a focus on and care for common resources, improving and expanding them, making them accessible to individuals, helping them break



free from the artificial scarcity of resources imposed by the economic system, despite the actual availability of these resources, which makes access costly and unavailable. However, it uses scarcity as a means to control and achieve greater profits.

It seems that these systems have imposed a shift towards consumer societies on us, or else they will be judged and classified as backward societies that do not keep pace with progress and civilization. It is natural for humans to consume to stay alive similar to all living beings. However, excessive consumption calls for a redefinition of consumption in our developing societies, as depleting our resources directly leads us to inevitable destruction.

In this context, a crucial question is raised about individuals' ability to control growth and the sufficiency of our ability to challenge economic and political systems. I am not in a rush to find an answer, as I am aware of my human limitations regarding those global systems. I have also lost confidence in what the system can offer, even in its most compassionate state towards us.

I have often thought, have limited individuals like me, and my community and the clan I know, succeeded in achieving those propositions? I have searched, and let us first review some experiences to decide this together.

## AMUL Dairy Cooperatives, India

Let me first explain what cooperatives are. According to the United Nations definition, a cooperative is “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned enterprise that embodies democratic management and control”.

AMUL is an abbreviation for Anand Milk Union Limited, a dairy cooperative founded in the state of Gujarat, India in the 1970s, in reaction to the exploitation of dairy farmers in the state by intermediaries. Farmers were facing low prices and unfair conditions, prompting them to unite and establish a cooperative that enabled them to sell milk directly without intermediaries and earn better revenues. It succeeded in empowering farmers and enhancing rural development in the state at that time, becoming a successful cooperative model and greatly contributing to making India the world’s largest milk producer, with 24% of global production. The cooperative currently includes 18 subsidiary unions and 3.6 million farmers in 18,600 villages.

After its success, AMUL now aspires to become a trillion-rupee company by the fiscal year 2025-2026, reflecting the 6% annual growth rate of the dairy sector in India, surpassing the global av-



erage of 2%. It seems that farmers' ownership and control of the cooperative played a crucial role in its success.

Have cooperatives helped enhance food sovereignty, protect farmers' rights, and support agriculture? The current and quick answer is yes. They have achieved community development, reduced poverty, enhanced self-sufficiency, and helped reduce reliance on massive global economies.

This success has sparked a desire within the system to create branches to incorporate this type of experience, making it part of the system rather than beyond its control. Does this constitute success in achieving radical abundance within a system that sees roots only as an opportunity for artificial proliferation?

The ambitious of AMUL cooperative, or any entity that decided to rebel and break away from the system to achieve justice, abundance, and dignity, changed during the experiment, turning the noble goal into a mere shadow of the very system it sought to resist. This raises several questions: will the desire for expansion, dominance, control, and global competition have a negative impact on both parties' competition and on the opportunities of others who do not enjoy privileges? Will this human desire for development and growth lead us once again to become part of the system we aspire to break free from and limit its control?

Let us now review another experience on a different continent from Africa, where I live, feeling that I am an integral part of, facing somehow similar economic and political conditions in our communities. Perhaps we can draw some lessons different from the AMUL experience, or maybe I will find some answers to my questions.

### **Oromia Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Union, Ethiopia**

The Oromia Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Union (OCFCU) was established in Ethiopia in 1999, as a necessary response to support small coffee farmers in the region. At that time, farmers were facing harsh conditions; they cultivated small areas of land without owning the necessary agricultural equipment or even transportation means to transport their crops to markets. This made it difficult for them to have fair prices for their products due to intermediators and traders controlling coffee prices, reducing farmers' share of profits and increasing their suffering.

Initially, the union's goal was to protect farmers and provide technical and financial assistance (such as small loans). Thanks to the union, farmers were able to sell their coffee directly in global markets without the need for intermediaries, with some negotiations to achieve fair prices. Over time, the union spread fair trade, organic and sustainable agriculture concepts among these farmers. It invested in local community development, such as build-



ing schools, health clinics, and providing clean drinking water. When the union was founded, it encompassed 34 farmers' cooperatives. With ongoing efforts, this number has risen to over 197 agricultural cooperatives, and the union has a clear organizational structure consisting of all members, a board of directors, a supervisory committee, and many employees, ensuring the economic, social, and cultural needs of farmers are met.

The Ethiopian government issued a decree in 1998 allowing the formation of large cooperatives (unions and cooperative associations), paving the way for cooperatives to come together and unite efforts to find solutions to improve their conditions. It is worth mentioning that cooperatives in Ethiopia have existed since the 1950s, but they have not effectively contributed to development, especially those cooperatives established during the socialist regime and managed accordingly, making them unprofitable cooperatives dependent on support. They also imposed a non-democratic form of management on these cooperatives, hindering them from achieving development and independence.

In an attempt to find answers to my urgent questions that strongly drive me to contemplate the two experiences, I find that both cooperatives started as a response to the harsh conditions individuals were facing in those communities. Establishing cooperatives was a way to overcome the control of intermediators, enhance economic

independence, and empower individuals to improve their economic conditions. Cooperatives helped them access local and global markets, allowing them to negotiate to achieve better prices, promoting food and economic sovereignty, and reducing reliance on major economies and intermediators. The efforts of both cooperatives were not limited to the economic aspect but extended to the development of their local communities, reflecting the importance of cooperatives' role in communities.

However, the challenge facing both experiences is to sustain success without affecting the cooperative's identity. For example, AMUL initially began as a liberation movement from the intermediators' dominance. It then expanded to become a huge economic entity, as such bringing itself back to the system it tried to break free from. Cooperative expansion may lead to deviation from the goal, causing it to lose its original identity built on cooperation, participation, and democracy, to become an economic entity that mimics the capitalist system. Although the Oromia Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Union experience was successful and yielded tangible results in the community, the state still dominates development paths. This illustrates that policies and systems control growth, making the individuals' desire for economic independence and achieving radical abundance extremely complex.



Despite the passion that fills individuals and their strong will to make positive changes in their daily and future lives or even define their path, the political and economic system holds the upper hand and the great powers capable of controlling the paths of development and growth, determining the trajectory of cooperative experiments, whether to enhance their success or hinder it. They put the hope and ambitions of individuals to build a better future to the test.

It seems that the desire of individuals alone, whether for growth or degrowth, is not enough!

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نعم الفضاء على الرسالية  
بتقليلك المنور

بعد وهم الذات والمفان والارتم لتفاني  
اد لنا كيفية التعامل مع النظام  
الجديد



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# **2070, when the Fierce Capitalist Monster was Eradicated by the Degrowth Sword**

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Mohammed Zayed



## 2070, when the Fierce Capitalist Monster was Eradicated by the Degrowth Sword

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“If you want to change systems, build a new model that renders the current model useless.” – attributed to Buckminster Fuller

The concept of “degrowth” presents a new vision of the current global system and the different nature of growth that replaces the current form of purely economic growth exacerbating global problems. It draws a futuristic picture of the best form of growth, but it lacks consideration of several dimensions related to people and the impact of growth on them, including the following:

### 1- People’s awareness of their cultural heritage

To achieve consumption rationalization and capitalist production regulation, people must emphasize their awareness of their cultural identity and ensure the absence of any alien data aiming to implant unreal needs based on the standards of major capitalist corporations (such as the obsession with fashion and beauty).

### 2- Defining well-being in line with people’s needs

The concept of degrowth lacks clarification of the definition of well-being or the establishment of a general framework, making

it necessary for each country to classify goods and services as essential or luxury based on its heritage and original needs without being influenced by global consumer culture.

### 3- Countries' interaction in applying the concept of degrowth

The concept of degrowth does not provide a clear mechanism for countries' interaction in case of a lack of global agreement on its implementation, which would make it difficult to apply the concept given the infiltration of capitalist ideas into countries' policies and people's culture, increasing their appetite for consumption accumulated over a long period of time, and hindering the provision of a decisive and rapid solution to address this impact.

### 4- Gradual transition to applying the concept

Transitioning to a sustainable lifestyle requires a gradual, applicable transformation in countries with different internal conditions.

To understand how these radical changes will impact our future lives, we must conduct an in-depth analysis of the effects of degrowth on various aspects of life.

## **Changes in Patterns of Daily Life**

Responsible Consumption: One of the essential aspects of degrowth is shifting towards more conscious and responsible consumption in-



stead of purchasing products in large quantities. It will encourage repairing faulty products, recycling, and choosing products based on people's needs from natural and durable materials. This means a change in shopping habits, seeking sustainable alternatives, and appreciating the value of the things we own.

Sustainable Mobility: Transport modes will undergo significant changes, with a focus on public transportation, cycling, and walking. We may witness a reduction in private car use and the emergence of pedestrian and cyclist-friendly cities. This will improve air quality, reduce traffic congestion, and enhance public health.

Local and Seasonal Nutrition: Our dietary habits will change significantly, with a focus on local and seasonal products. This means reducing reliance on processed and imported foods, supporting local farmers. Our meals will be more diverse and healthier, and we will have a stronger connection to Earth.

Sustainable Housing: Our homes will undergo significant changes, with a focus on energy efficiency, the use of eco-friendly building materials, and designing homes to ensure ventilation and natural lighting. We may see a return to small homes and space-efficient usage.

## Changes in Social and Economic Relationships

Strengthening Community Relations: Degrowth will enhance social relationships and community cohesion. Local communities will become more important, encouraging cooperation and exchange among neighbors. We may witness a return to local markets and the organization of shared community events.

Fair Distribution of Wealth: Degrowth aims to reduce the gap between the rich and poor, and achieve a fairer wealth distribution. This means increasing income for the poor, reducing working hours, and providing better public services for everyone.

Strong Local Economy: The economy will shift towards the local economy, encouraging local production and consumption. This will create new job opportunities, boost local economies, and reduce reliance on global trade.

## Challenges and Opportunities

To bring some clarity, we draw a comparison between traditional economic growth and the concept of degrowth, which is essential for understanding the fundamental differences between these concepts and their various dimensions.



<b>Aspect of Comparison</b>	<b>Traditional Economic Growth</b>	<b>Degrowth</b>
Main Objective	Increasing GDP, increasing consumption, and continuous economic expansion.	Improving quality of life, reducing disparities, protecting the environment, and transitioning to a more sustainable society.
Focus	Increasing production and expanding consumption.	Efficiency, recycling, repairing, responsible consumption, and waste reduction.
Continuous Economic Growth	Essential goal.	Unsustainable and undesirable.
Social Justice	May overlook or diminish its importance.	Focuses on reducing income and wealth disparities, providing equal opportunities for all.
Environmental Protection	May neglect or diminish its importance.	Puts it at the core of its concerns, seeks to reduce its negative impact.



Consumption	Encourages continuous and increasing consumption.	Encourages responsible and conscious consumption, focuses on product quality rather than quantity.
Jobs	Focuses on creating jobs in traditional industrial and commercial sectors.	Focuses on creating jobs in sustainable sectors such as renewable energy, organic agriculture, and waste management.
Happiness	Links it to economic growth and income increase.	Links it to social and environmental well-being, not just economic growth.

## Why is the Comparison Important?

- Evaluating Options: The comparison helps evaluate the available options for societies to determine the optimal path for development.
- Understanding Challenges: It helps understand the challenges faced by both concepts and how to overcome them.



- Policy Formulation: It helps formulate more sustainable and suitable economic and social policies for the people's situation.

## What Roles Can Governments, Companies, and Individuals Play in Achieving this Transition?

### Governments' Role

- Policy Formulation: Governments must establish policies that promote sustainability, such as imposing carbon taxes, supporting renewable energy, and encouraging organic farming.
- Infrastructure Investment: Investing in public transportation, green infrastructure, and upgrading government buildings to be more energy-efficient.
- Education and Awareness: Providing educational programs to raise citizens' awareness of sustainability and encourage them to make sustainable choices.
- International Cooperation: Collaborating with other countries to develop international agreements to combat climate change and protect the environment.

### Companies' Role

- Innovation: Investing in research and development to develop sustainable products and services.

- Transparency: Providing clear and detailed information to consumers about the impact of their products on the environment.
- Social Responsibility: Adopting socially responsible business practices, such as waste reduction, improving working conditions, and supporting local communities.
- Collaboration with the Government: Working with governments to establish stringent environmental standards and enforce them.

## Individuals' Role

- Lifestyle Change: Adopting sustainable consumption habits, such as waste reduction, recycling, and choosing local and organic products.
- Community Participation: Participating in community initiatives aimed at environmental protection, such as beach cleanups and tree planting.
- Awareness: Spreading awareness about the importance of sustainability among friends and family.
- Pressuring Decision-Makers: Communicating with government officials and companies to express support for sustainable policies.



## Personal Reflections:

The responsibility of implementing the concept of degrowth lies with governments, companies, and individuals alike. It would not be fair to ignore the concept or assume its inefficiency without overcoming the challenges mentioned above or providing alternative plans to deal with them. Furthermore, it would not be logical to demand that degrowth address the accumulated problems of the current growth over the years; it is one of the long-term solutions that must be supported by additional solutions to achieve the best outcome for individual and societal well-being.

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# The Theory of Blackfoot

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Hebah Moanis



## The Theory of Blackfoot

The world is in a frantic race towards progress, seeking happiness without pausing for a moment to redefine it in one's own unique way. Everyone is running everywhere and in every direction to acquire things, give things, or exchange things, forgetting that those things are their own selves burning to operate a production wheel somewhere unseen.

Some voices arise to protest against this meaning-empty framework; one of these voices is the voice of degrowth (regulating growth in the original Arabic text), a social academic movement that opposes capitalism with its concept related to economic growth and links it to the production process. This movement calls for redefining the concept of economic development, linking it to human happiness and the specificity of community economies, that is making the economy closely related to human well-being rather than growth as a number, and giving communities the freedom to map out their economic path. In short, pausing for a moment and limiting production to meet needs rather than feed desires, as the former is limited while the latter is endless.

## The Impact of the Blackfoot

Few of us do not know Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which categorizes human needs sequentially, moving to a higher level after fulfilling the minimum. The base of the pyramid includes basic physiological needs such as breathing, food and water, sleep and sex, while it ends at its top with the highest needs in self-actualization through achievements and creative activities. It is a logical thought; how can a hungry person think of painting a picture or composing a beautiful piece of music?

But on the other hand, few of us know the observations of the world-renowned scientist Abraham Maslow in the 1940s when living with the indigenous tribes of Canada, especially the Blackfoot or Siksika tribe, which result in ideas apparently opposing Maslow's triangle. The structure of the tribe focuses on the community as a whole, particularly emphasizing generosity and caring for others rather than material accumulation and possession. The richest is actually the poorest materially, because they already gave all they have. Maslow saw how to build a cohesive society that encourages individuals to seek social prosperity first before focusing on their individual needs, suggesting there could be a different hierarchy of needs. Instead of starting with basic individual needs and striving for self-actualization. Some researchers believe the structure of the Blackfoot community focused on the evolution



of societies to achieve cohesion, enabling individuals to strive for personal development without compromising their sense of happiness. The question arises: were the Blackfoot wiser and providing a more advanced social model than what we witness today?

## **The Retreat of the River Waters after the Flood**

Like Noah's flood that submerged the entire world, leaving only the shipbuilder in the desert racing against time to complete it, capitalism comes in its brutal form to drown humans in a flood of artificial needs amidst piles of waste, resembling a demonic world warning of an imminent end. Another question arises: what will the flood look like? Can we avoid it? Or are we actually the flood victims without realizing it?

The term "degrowth" comes from the French term "la décroissance" coined by the French philosopher André Gorz, meaning the decrease of the floodwaters and the return of the river to its natural state, trying to indicate that intensive, irresponsible consumption as a human pattern is an unnatural situation that necessitates corrective action, or else the flood is a natural reaction, but a violent one. Just as Noah's flood gave life to the ship's passengers and granted them a new chance without prior rules, Gorz's flood gives the river a new opportunity to return to its proper state, even if it means losing the inhabitants of the banks. This idea, for me, de-

spite its darkness, seems like an unattainable dream; our lives intersect and intertwine with many constraints. The movement does not call for a completely different economic concept but appears to be a correction from within the capitalist organization itself, even if it clashes with and rejects it openly.

## **What if the Race Stops?**

Each society, indeed each individual, has its uniqueness: hopes and disappointments, desires and fears, happiness and sadness. This remarkable and wonderful diversity is what distinguishes us. Therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. What capitalism does is unify this diversity by commodifying everything, even humans themselves, and reselling them repeatedly. We remain consumers and producers, sellers and buyers simultaneously and all the time to keep the factory gears running continuously. We remain in this race, receiving the baton from our predecessors to hand it over to those after us, joining those sitting on the roadside waiting for death, feeling ashamed of our burden on a life built on our bodies.

Let's imagine, what if this race stops? Hmm... the world would undoubtedly be a better place, humans would be lighter and their footprint gentler on the environment, more happiness, less pressure, integration with nature, and connection with oneself. Community development will be more linked to its needs. It seems like



a world with more social, economic, and urban justice. Each society defines its needs and works on its own map and rhythm. A world characterized by beautiful diversity, not the deadly uniformity of conformity, even if it claims to respect it. A world without rushing in Olympic races, where everyone walks to discover life. Here comes another question: doesn't this somewhat sound like a utopian dream?

### **What if Another Race Starts?**

Similar to every beautiful dream, it needs clear mechanisms to be realized; otherwise, it will fall into the wolf's den. This is the fear facing degrowth: how can such proposal avoid falling under the same capitalism? How can happiness avoid being commodified and litigated with money, social justice be replaced by personal ambition, and cultural heritage bartered for economic decline?

Supporters of the movement emphasize the importance of replacing GDP as the sole tool for measuring growth with more comprehensive tools such as the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), which considers the well-being of nations by integrating environmental and social factors, and the Happy Planet Index (HPI), which includes the environmental impact of human activities on the planet at the expense of community well-being. All these bring us back to the general framework of the concept, claiming to want to break the old frameworks.

Humans are, naturally, lovers of numbers and comparisons, which the capitalist concept exploits to develop a sense of competition among humans with their legitimate desire to feel unique. From the same perspective, there is fear that war against the illusory race of capitalism may be replaced with a new kind of race, not imposed by the concept itself, but driven towards it, and we are driven with it. A new dream becomes unreachable. Here, I recall the idealism of setting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the fragmentation and content depletion in the current context, becoming mere tick marks for some countries, completing specific tasks without effective goals.

### **Do we have the freedom to chart a path where not all of us stand at its starting point?**

When degrowth calls on societies to redefine their well-being and chart a growth path to work on, it raises fears and a legitimate question about who will draw the map and hold the pen. What if not everyone is seen? Here rises the dilemma of community participation, participatory policies, representation justice, and equality in all its forms. Before attempting to answer the mechanism of ensuring implementation, a sharper question poses itself: what if another community draws its welfare path at the expense of others? What if America sees its welfare in increased consumption? Or Eu-



rope in manufacturing? Or Israel in settlement growth? And what if some ally to undermine or buy the welfare of the weaker others?

Do all societies have the same capability to achieve this sensible transition for degrowth? Let's be honest; this might raise panic more than imagination. Will the least fortunate countries be able to pay the bill for this transition, which seems legitimate, required, and fair? And who will be affected if this transition begins? Many challenges will face these societies, including increased unemployment and poverty rates if growth slows down and consumption decreases. Will this lead to an unforeseen recession for developing economies? Will this affect social and political stability? How will the process of defining welfare standards and mapping out the road be managed? How will progress in implementation be measured, as change will require a complex restructuring of policies, social systems, and global trade networks?

Who can bear the cost of degrowth while suffering from accumulated debts, reduce working hours with high unemployment rates, or invest in technology as alternative solutions while facing continuous power cuts? More importantly, who governs this transition and directs it for the benefit of society? Which society do we exactly mean when talking about cultural heritage, justice, and rights? Is there a definite guarantee for that?

The truth is, we are not all at the same starting point, and despite the movement theorists deleting this starting line and giving each society the right to determine its movements and directions comprehensively and with absolute freedom, even freedom is not absolute; it is restricted. Yet to avoid being pessimistic or irresponsible, I do not deny that stumbling is not the only fate of developing countries, and the fear of being engulfed again upon receiving a new chance for survival is not their only destiny, as they must confront their intellectual battles and engage in finding solutions no matter how harsh the path appears. Coming late is better than never coming at all. True, if the transition is not sensible, vital, and capable of facing and anticipating challenges, it will increase its victims, with the most likely victims being the most vulnerable groups, the Blackfoot who degrowth fought for. Labels do not seem to be the root problem as much as the wisdom and conscience driving those practices.

In the end, the question remains: are we ready to face our fears to redefine our concepts of growth and well-being? Can we abandon the frantic race of capitalism and begin to build more just and sustainable communities? The answer is not easy, but it is worth the attempt. Let's start now, before the flood sweeps us away.

Will the Blackfoot survive this time and take control?

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صباح نور الترمي دون توقف لمعرفة اذا كنت  
احترق هذا الترمي ام لا ؟؟  
طوبى لمن التمس اليه ايمه الكفر الفياض لدرواع اخرن  
الخصام التفر يد اطفوان وما هو سبب العالم  
بعد الطوفان ؟  
سبحان الله العظيم

**الخرف** من تسليح Diogenes  
وقوله الى سلمه ويستقر  
الطوفان







# 4

Book Four:  
**Return to the self**

“I Am Not Myself”

## “I Am Not Myself”

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Are we confused? Full stop and new line.

Who are we? Who are they? We are capitalism, and capitalism is us. We have produced what produces us. How do we produce what consumes us? Aren't they us? And we are them?

Are we confused again? Full stop and new line.

How do we position ourselves? What is our place in this system? We enjoy the privileges and acknowledge them! We reject their impact and production! We drink whipped coffee and curse its makers! We enjoy air conditioning and cry over its emissions!

Are we confused again? Full stop and new line.

Who are we? Who are they? We are capitalism, and capitalism is us. We have produced what produces us. How do we produce what consumes us? Aren't they us? And we are them?

Wait a minute! I found the answer: we are a group trying!

Are we confused again? Full stop and don't start a new line.



We will write poetry and letters. We will take photos and hum songs.

We will pray behind Moses, perhaps the sea will part. We will memorize the tablets of Gilgamesh by heart.

We will build an ark to escape the flood.

Then we may find the dear friend, lean on each other's shoulders.

"And we say, by God, this is not right

We should not start the sign except with the flood, right?

We must have a flood! Do we really need a flood?"





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## **Ceasing to Ascend**

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Esraa Aman



## Ceasing to Ascend

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Is there room for employees in a world of degrowth?

What is the concept of public and private?

What is heritage, how do we inherit it, and how do we break it?

In a world of isolation within the area of Seyouf Shama'a in East Alexandria, buildings of companies working in navigation, trade, and others are located. I do not remember the area having a market but rather a vegetable store, a bakery, a falafel and ful store, and 4 schools: the first is Azhari, the second is Brotherhood-affiliated, the third is private, and the fourth is a languages school. The majority of employees of Memphis Company agreed that their children would attend the private school to preserve their religion and Arabic language and to prevent anyone from manipulating their minds, so things remain under control as much as possible.

They also agreed on the format of outings, with a monthly going-out-for-lunch at Abdel Wahab Grill, weekly visits to family, buying a summer house in October 6 in the Agami area (Palm Beach), and setting clear rules: do not boast, do nothing without thinking, play

only with children we know, preserve good relations with people you know, always remain a light guest, overeating causes indigestion... Instructions were repeated according to situations and questions. It reached its peak when my father rebelled against the heritage of the Memphis building, no longer tolerating the neighbours' observations due to the bitterness of their implicit agreement that we must frame the lives of our children to make them promising youth.

He was bothered by the implicit agreements, contexts, and paths, and by the evening gatherings in front of the grocer as men discussed their strictness with their families. He could no longer tolerate Seyouf Shama'a, envisioning himself in Sidi Gaber- his favourite area ever, adjacent to their summer house in Cleopatra in the sixties. He held onto this dream. Regularly, he stood in front of an empty space in front of Sidi Gaber phone office, wishing that God would bless him with a residence in this area; where transportation is everywhere, there is a market, camaraderie, and tranquility. He kept saving up until his dream was realized, boundaries were broken, and many implicit agreements disappeared.

Now I go to a school where the supervisor will not force me to wear a necktie, and I can stay outside until 10 PM. There are no longer eyes piercing our actions, from entering the building's gate to the house's door, and my mother is no longer forced to clean day and



night in case one of Memphis employees' wives' visits. So, my father achieved the American dream in his Egyptian attire. But what now?

We have not completely abandoned the implicit agreements, nor have we shed the heritage of the Memphis employees, as they were the first group that carried all the other groups. Writing any other narratives about our identity without it is an innovation.

## **Degrowth Facing Memphis Employees**

That group respects any group as long as it contains even one of their ideas. They do not know that they have created a special group, with a different language, in an isolated area from the Alexandrian community in general, which I only hear about from books and memories of my friends now! They interact with the sea and beaches almost daily, while for me, the sea was just a route from Victoria to Mansheya, with very few memories I stole with my cousins to touch the water.

In this kind of isolation, I have never seen the need to go to a large hypermarket to buy household necessities, or that we are in dire need of a vegetable and fish market. We sufficed with the available choices as they are, whatever the quality. As long as the house is not lacking in protein, fruits, and vegetables, there is no problem.

## So why this feeling of discomfort then?

In a discussion about the principle of degrowth, we think as a group- whatever it may be- how to deal with it. Let us take some time and think from all perspectives to arrive at the most appropriate image for growth, or as I like to draw it: let's have a calm session, ponder, do not demolish or build, relax and live, see what our needs are, and choose our growth form.

From a soft standpoint, it is a good hypothesis, but it is conflict-free and discomfort-free, resembling the teachings of ancient religions, idealistic, but “polished” to be tested, not the other way around, and there is no shame in that, as outside that room, a handful of people are now trying to build a group and isolate themselves, and we will see what will happen to them.

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انا بنت المواطن  
المستقر والباحثة في الحياة  
المستقر ومحببة الانجاز والدراس  
المستقلة واليادية التي افضرك

بابا  
صاحب القوة  
والرأي.

السيدة شامعة الاسكندرية





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## **Tharwat Bridge**

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Ruqayyah Mamduh al-Jaafari



## Tharwat Bridge<sup>15</sup>

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### 1- Desire\ Dream

I have no memory of how it started. I do not know who influenced me. I woke up one day not wanting to grow up in the small city, similar to my mother. Because she is from the capital, I developed a right and legacy that I am part of this distant city. When we travelled, intermittently and shortly, I would pack dreams before luggage... We are in the city that does not want us to sleep. It accepts everyone and gives everyone. But constantly reminds you of “all depends on your wit”.

### 2- Road\ Method

I ask, “how can I be witty?”. My home is here, my family is here, my dreams are here, and I am from this Hurghada at the top of the food pyramid, benefiting from the system. I want the exclusive treatment. The sea is my world. Like the sea in front of me, I see infinity. Like the sea, I start from a shore. Like the sea, I end up at another shore. My family was keen on providing me with the best education, the best schools, and the most widely spoken languages.

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<sup>15</sup>- I want to thank dear Youstina Ebeid, for while we were talking about various things, the title occurred.

As usual, I made sure to always be part of the picture, no matter who took it. Now, the system allows you to move, literally and metaphorically.

The university application system sees you as a grade, a number. You belong to this college, this discipline, because you are that grade, that number. Now I have a real opportunity in Cairo, in the capital, in the centre. I try to adjust myself so that we win this battle. I change major more than once because I do not know which weapons are stronger. I immerse myself in mathematics even though I was from the humanities section in high school. Inexplicably, I get caught up with technical determinism of our times, and learn programming for a month. What do I want? I do not know. But I know I want more.

### 3- The Shock

Now I, the grade, my father, no me, I am in Cairo. What I own, what I am, what owns me is no longer enough. Now I am staying in the small flat by Tharwat Bridge. I carry the sword facing the gun. My professor tells me to buy ammunition, and if I cannot, I will be the ammunition myself. I ask Karl Marx what to do? Where are you? I answer myself timidly, “how can I be witty?” No, “how can I be wittier?” and “What is the new number?”



#### 4- Adaptation \ Resistance

Resist or adapt? Dear all, we oscillate between the subject and the object. How much do I have to adapt to be able to resist? When and to what extent will the system allow me? Will the space I am allocated suffice? Or do I need to lose weight?

This disguised resistance manoeuvres the system to gain a raise in the position with which the system rewarded it. Sometimes it makes fun of the fact that it made a decision with its free will, and more often because it has no free will.

I run away from the image that I did not want to become. Or is life a mere journey, and we are researchers? Now, I am a double agent of me and us. So how do I get back? How do I rearrange dreams and luggage? Who do I return to? And return to where?

#### **Endnotes**

The world was and still is facing the paradox of need and desire. On the one hand, capitalism is based on the accumulation of wealth for profit. Accordingly, the economy must grow, individuals (real or moral) must compete, and creativity and progress prevail. The market stabilizes due to these interactions, reflecting prices. All this is happening by our own free will and with the help of modern technology. Similar to all models and ideas, humans have attempt-

ed to challenge the assumptions and givens of capitalism throughout the ages. We are talking here about the student movements of the 1960s and 1970s that rejected excessive consumption and the restrictions of capitalism on the helpless individual. The “counterculture” invites us to break free from the grip of every occupier and dare to desire something different. The degrowth movement arises to challenge criteria for measuring progress, both individually and collectively. It dreams of authentic economic relations that reflect the specificity of each economic model by focusing on local communities, and create an economic network that appreciates, serves and supports its players. It dreams of prompt distribution and rational production and consumption. It resists the narrative reducing communities and individuals to numbers that exclude those it will and prioritize whomever it wants.

Jason Heikal and his predecessors throw you the keys to the game,

But “all depends on your wit”

Find the way on this road,

Collide,

Crash,

Adapt,

But do not stop resisting.



السيرة القوية لها هياج  
أشعر بالامان حين أرتقا  
حين تقدم البيت اشرفهم ايمان  
حين ارضوا لصور الام

**الرجل** بعد بلدوزر الكومبر  
الفاضله المستقره موهدين في كل مكان  
هل يمكن استنباط الاستنتاجات حين  
سبين وعل Degrowth هو الحل

**ايها العالم الاخضر العجيد**  
**خباياك في قلب من**  
**البلدوزر والفو السريع**





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# Humanity Growth First!

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Sally Ali



## Humanity Growth First!

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The Global North and the Global South continue to struggle over resources, land, and power. The two poles unevenly battle to create a reality that unites them on common grounds. Still, it seems like a zero-sum game: for one pole to exist, the other must diminish. The conditionality of the game takes hold over me. It composes a nest so stubborn in my imagination. It builds a home for itself—one that is difficult to dismantle, for I have acquired everything needed to assert its ownership—papers, records, and proceedings that make its abolishment nearly impossible. So, I dive into my thoughts, drawn to pivotal historical points in my awareness. Where am I from humanity? Where is my positionality? What do my interests mean? And what are the limits of my ability to change that positionality? And I find myself pondering even more into the essence of things. I ask, what does humanity mean? Well-being? Growth? Degrowth? Collectivesurvival?

### **The First Moment—September 2001: The Meaning of Humanity**

My understanding of humanity commenced when I realized how

deeply a person's heart can ache for the suffering of another. One with which the other had no connection or shared tie other than humanity. It was the day we woke to an image that broke all our hearts—the murder of the child Muhammad Al-Durrah in his father's arms. Even more harrowing, to me, was the sight of his grieving father—helpless and tearful. That day, my classmates and I went on to protest for the very first time. None of us, at the time, had the slightest idea of the political protests, what it entails, or what impact it could have.

**“Humanity**—the highest bond between human beings—is the right to live, a right no one should ever uproot off another under any pretext.”

## **The Second Moment—January 2011: The Meaning of Well-Being**

A new beginning, marked with immense hope and ambition for a better life and realizing yet another one of life rights: achieving social justice and equality. Our right to a homeland that embraces its offspring and does not sicken nor impoverish them, nor does it forcibly evict them out. January 2011 was my second protest, ten years after my first protest. This time, I was fully aware of all our political and social rights. I was fully aware that every individual has the right to a dignified life befitting their humanity. I was hope-



ful; in the face of several waves of disappointment, I was hopeful. I have always had this powerful empathy towards any suffering human being, inside or outside home. Perhaps I perpetually live by the echoes of Mohamed Mounir's voice when he said, "Humans matter to me, even without an address."

**“Well-being:** the collective shared awareness and recognition that every individual has the right to a dignified life and the agency to live that life to its fullest.”

### **The Third Moment – March 2020: Degrowth in Action**

A moment of global human silence that we may never encounter again: the entire world brought to a halt by the grip of a human pandemic like COVID-19—one I believe was manufactured by global capitalism. Yes, I am convinced of a conspiracy in this case. Yet, even though it was the creation of the capitalist beast, it affected everyone. Even the countries that feed and nurture this beast were not spared.

I remember asking myself, in fear, anticipation, and awe: where is the world? There is no world. What comes next? Will the world perish? Will we all die? So many fears, moments of pain, tears, and breakdowns—millions infected, millions died. Death made no distinction between the Global North and the Global South. It did not discriminate between White and Black. This led me to ask: what

have all the theories, studies, strategies, of economic growth—both current and future—achieved? Were they able to halt the relentless march of this capitalist beast over the bodies of thousands? Could they slow its growth enough for us to catch up with humanity and stop the death that swept across the globe? Thousands of cries echoed in every language.

The pandemic demolished all the prior studies, analyses, theories, and projects that had served a false narrative of economic, environmental, and social growth that the North had been feeding us for years. The most pressing question was: is COVID-19 the deepest human catastrophe or a slap in humanity's face from nature? A scream of protest against all human practices and crimes committed under the guise of economic growth.

We saw nature breathe again, reclaiming fragments of its spirit trampled by the capitalist monster. This brings us back to the same question: should we slow down this growth? Should we rein in the capitalist beast that devours nature and most humans to serve a select few? Perhaps.

**“Degrowth:** when neither death, nature, nor poverty differentiates between the North and the South.”



## The Fourth Moment—October 2023: Growth in Action

On the morning of October 10<sup>th</sup>, I woke to the third consecutive day of the relentless carpet-bombing of Gaza in the occupied Palestinian lands. Palestine—a nation subjected to every conceivable war crime known to mankind, including occupation, settler colonialism, resource theft, apartheid, systemic violence, murder, siege, carpet-bombing, and the stripping of food and water sovereignty, among other violations of human rights and humanity all together. That night, I went to bed with anger furring in my chest, naively hoping that I would wake to the racing of Arab armies to aid Palestine in its resistance. I woke to nothing of that sort. In fact, I woke to a world unchanged.

At work, I observed colleagues going about their usual business—some in apparent sorrow, some in shock, and others in complete indifference. I could not help but spend the day absent-minded, scrolling through social media to follow the news. I found no calls to stop, slow down, or protest the massacres that will later appear to be systemic and intentional genocide. It became clear to me then that the massacres would not stop. Gaza's skies would not stop raining death and destruction, nor would the rain be halted. The death toll, ever rising, agonized me like a dagger in my chest. Looking into my hands, I realized that we too have been complicit in holding that dagger.

Regrettably, capitalism has once again united the world—North and South—not to dismantle the capitalist structure nor to minimise the losses of COVID-19, but to stand silent and complicit with an onglotating genocide. I realized that capitalism is the true enemy; it has always been and will not stop voluntarily. No matter how much we, in the Global South, strive to do research, envision theories, or even embrace theses like degrowth, our imagination will remain shackled by the chains of colonialism.

“**Growth:** the shared global complicity in perpetuating the massacre, as long as it fuels the engine of capitalism.”

## **The Fifth Moment—September 2024: The Making of Collective Survival**

Successive blows to humanity, my thoughts and my emotions wake me up one day to realize that all what I once believed to be true about the world, about Arab countries, was nothing but elusive notions made to cope with a horrifying truth. I was awakened to confront my true positionality within capitalism, humanity, the Arab world, or even as a member of the Global South. I swing in my positionalities and what they could make of me in relation to the world. Having long lost count of the days after January 2024, a glance on my phone struck me with the fact that it is September 2024 already. I find myself seated within a group of peers all united



by one inquiry: do we have the right to envision a better future for humanity as a whole? A better future for all who are oppressed by the capitalist monster, every nation suffering its harm—whether in Congo, Pakistan, Egypt, India, Cuba, or elsewhere—do we possess enough cultural capital and alternative definitions of wellbeing to curb the artificial relentless wheel of growth that privileges a few elites? Would the Global North let that happen, whether for an economic, social, or environmental end? Do we still have the right to wake up and sing with Mounir “We care about humans, even if they have no address”?

“**Collective Survival:** the ability to daydream, to imagine alternative worlds, and to sketch our dreams in the colours we love... collectively.”

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# **I Hold you in my Heart**

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Sally Gindy



## I Hold you in my Heart

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### 1- The Bulldozer

You are about to read a personal story. What my story reflects when I talk about old houses in an alternative model is a reading of what the existing urban setting means to us, the city, and the economy. Here, I oppose to the idea that heritage buildings are mere built structures; they are incubators of memories and human roots, previously-paid natural, environmental and economic resources. Previously paid because they have already played their role in the economic growth with construction material, humanpower, and forming small capital for my small family.

My story is a personal call to rethink rapid economic growth. I seek to connect what made me enthusiastic about “degrowth” with my daily reality. Instead of continuing to build new projects which consume resources and destroy heritage, I attempt to challenge the bulldozer and aggressive economic growth with a more sensitive approach to what we carry along of memory and the existing urban setting. Collectively, can we adapt a more sustainable approach that reuses what is already there and respects the environment and the community?

*“Degrowth” is an economic and social approach encouraging not connecting welfare with material economic growth and aggressive economic growth based on artificial scarcity. Instead, degrowth focuses on improving the quality of living through protecting social identity and cultural heritage. Degrowth also calls for reducing economic growth rates in order to achieve environmental balance and social justice, rather than focusing on increasing production and consumption.*



I observe the old houses, those which are still standing and used. Where did they go? Is this feeling in my heart nostalgia or shock? I wonder, I write, I think, yet there is no answer. Abroad, I am fascinated by the people’s insistence to inhabit old houses as long as they are still usable. Houses that are already built, houses which



have already consumed environmental resources, houses which have for long held people and is still capable for that, so why can we simply abandon them?

I observe these houses, take photos and a deep breath. I remember how my city receives continuous waves of development and rapid economic growth, which do not protect the individual, my small family, nor my community; thus, do not protect the majority of my people. I find these houses resisting in the outskirts of the city, and pray that the waves of development do not reach them.

Development has reached my small family in the South of Egypt, and left a scar in my heart. Each and every time I come across these old houses I ache. We had to leave the house, which was originally for my ancestors. For more than sixty years these walls had held our secrets, but alas, the investors dug in to build a huge ugly cement skyscraper that has nothing in common with our house.



It was a spacious two-floor house with many balconies and bedrooms. It was a kind house. We all provided care and hoped to stay within these walls as long as the house was capable of standing still. But abruptly enters the investor. He approached us and my mother refused rigidly. He used his connections and authority. My mother insists, for our sake, and for all the efforts that my father, and earlier my grandfather, had exerted in the house. Following threats to our own safety, we had to leave for a very unworthy sum of money to an almost unknown future. My family's will persisted for years, but it was defeated before the bulldozer. The investor turned our house into a 10-floor building on the same area in the narrow street, a manifestation of our defeat as I see it.

After some time, I passed by the same site to overcome my feelings. I again saw our memories destroyed by the bulldozer in the name of development. Weeping over the rubble, we have nothing to do except document our story, that we were here.

I had to leave my house, then I left the south of Egypt altogether. However, the South, my house, and the nightmares with the bulldozer never left me.

I do not mean to write about nostalgia to old houses. I do not deny it, but I make it a point to highlight the rejection of the rapid urban expansion that destroys these buildings, my house and others.



## 2- Public Spaces

You are reading a personal story saying that I am not just a number. I write as a person seeking better living conditions outside their original governorate, but is faced with the challenges of big cities, including air pollution, yearning for green spaces, and investors' control of public spaces.

I write, and connect my ideas with “degrowth”. I repropose rethinking of rapid economic growth. I attempt to connect what interested me in “degrowth” with what I experience daily. I seek to challenge fierce urban growth and the bulldozer with a more sensitive thinking. I contemplate my continuous search for green spaces and free-of-charge beaches. I wonder: who can protect us? Who can guarantee our most basic rights of entertainment? How am I supposed to see nature from the city's walls? When will ever growth see us? Hey rapid growth, do you hear me?

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Years pass. I leave my governorate in Upper Egypt and head to Cairo, similar to most citizen outside the Capital. This is what the city forced us to do, in search for job opportunities and better living conditions.

In the beginning, the idea that I would not survive amidst all that air pollution would attack me. I would bat on my chest, reassuring it that we are not dying from asthma someday. I promise it that we will head to look for the green, a tree's shade that we can hide in.

I came with high hopes of public free-of-charge parks. Yet I was shocked that the investor who swallowed our house in Upper Egypt is just one among many here in the Capital, protected by their authority. They are the authority.

I was in the lookout for green that will protect us from air pollution, and that will keep us sane amidst the wheel of accelerating growth. Science says that we need time in nature daily for our mental health. But what science does not say, because it should be given, that one finds a tree to protect one during heat, so that the heavy sun would not eat away one's head after air pollution eat away one's lungs.

### 3- Occupation

In a visit to Port Said, I see the Mediterranean behind a wall, an-



other wall, then the sea. I was not surprised; in the recent years I saw the sea behind walls in Alexandria. I saw how difficult it has become to access public beaches that can accommodate different social and economic classes in Egypt. The same applies to parks.

I stood for a couple of seconds, and approached the officer: “I want to go in please, like the fishermen inside”.

“It is prohibited. And there are no fishermen inside. These are officers.”

This wall is one to three years all, similar to most walls in this city.

Walls between us and nature, same like the occupation practices.

Oh, beautiful green world, I hold you in my heart, away from the bulldozer and rapid growth.





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# **In search of what I have lost along the way**

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Mohamed Mogahed



## In search of what I have lost along the way

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I think that I resemble my upbringing; I lean towards calmness and simplifying matters. It is difficult for me to understand why some would prefer to discuss deeply personal issues using grandiose and complex terms and concepts.

Here I am, three days after discussions about an alternative economic framework which works alongside capitalism and implicitly replicates it by diverting attention away from issues of wealth, economic growth, global trade, and the open market. It reframes the enemy—or rather, the danger—into the risks of climate change as an inevitable threat to the entire planet, prompting us to unite and confront it to the extent of our abilities.

I do not know my positionality in regard to the degrowth thesis or in relation to theories of economic systems and growth. However, my personal narratives cross roads with similar dangers to what degrowth preaches. Are my personal struggles as immense as climate change? Would it stand in to face the hegemony and violence of capitalism? I do not know. So, in this piece, I will ponder on some questions about my positionality.

## Where do the city locals play?

Tanta, 2015—a young man goes out for a run in what used to be called Tanta Sports Stadium. He starts running when a staff member of the stadium approaches. The staff member warns him: “by the way, do not come [for a run] tomorrow because [the running] track will undergo some developments. One could tell from the tonality of that statement that the “developments” will take a while. Bewildered, I asked myself, “Developments for what? The track is perfectly functional!”. I resumed my run, despite my agitation, wondering, “when would those developments end?” and whether our bike-rider president is content with the matter. That was my last run in the stadium. As I went home, I was overburdened by the question of where to run tomorrow—perhaps in the streets that are not fit for a walk?

Two days later, I had hopes for a “goodbye run,” but unfortunately, I found the stadium’s gates shut with a giant, shining padlock as grand as the imperialist. I officially realized that the matter is over. My agitation turned into anger, and I decided to inquire more into the matter by raising the issue with a more senior staff member. He lit his cigarette and spoke, “True, Mr. The stadium is enclosed. Its ownership will return to the Governorate after it was owned by the Ministry of Sports. On its premise, a giant enterprise project will launch.”



Emblems of the imperialist started flying on the building after a few months. Soon, deconstruction of the stadium ensued. Soccer fields, basketball pitches, a swimming pool, and a small gym were no more. And the stadium turned into a private city club, one I never entered.

## Where do the zoo animals go?

In 2019, my girlfriend from Cairo decided to visit me in Tanta. Since we both enjoy open spaces where we can easily see the sky, our options were limited to the agricultural fields or the Tanta Zoo (Andalus Park, commonly known as the Montazah), the space where most of my childhood memories took place. It was the best day when my mother would pick us up from school and lead us there to enjoy lunch amongst the animals. We would run, play, climb trees, and breathe fresh air—all at a low cost. Everyone would be delighted.

The park also served another critical purpose, as confirmed by an official from the Ministry of Agriculture: it facilitated daily visitation rights for 70 parents, allowing them to see their children as mandated by court rulings.

About a year after my visit to the park with my girlfriend, the joyful day we spent surrounded by my childhood animal friends, the

residents of Tanta and myself were shocked to find the park's iconic gate in the city centre closed and sealed with red wax. Reasons came afterwards: to resolve the ongoing dispute between the Central Administration of Zoos under the Ministry of Agriculture and the Gharbia Governorate over ownership of the park, the president had kindly issued a decree to remove the public utility designation from several state-owned properties, including Al-Andalus Park Zoo in Tanta.

The fate of the Tanta Zoo animals is unknown to me. Perhaps they were redistributed to other zoos, sold, or shipped to the UAE? Anyway, I broke up with my girlfriend, the zoo was dismantled, its historical trees were chopped, and it was turned into a bleak Chillout gas station that has nauseated me each time I pass by it.

During the workshop, I learned about the concept of enclosure (as portrayed by the thesis of Degrowth) and began to discern beyond the transformations taking place in the city. I also realized that the colonization of the city by investors happens in stages. The first stage is neglect (intentional, perhaps; who knows?) so that public spaces can no longer serve their purpose efficiently. Then comes the “investor” to “rescue” them (and us), enclosing these public spaces and turning them into repulsive capitalist enterprises—like converting a zoo into a gas station or transforming a local, accessible



sports stadium into a private club requiring exorbitant membership fees and catering only to a specific elite.

I thought about the number of public spaces that once existed in Tanta and have since disappeared—the island in the middle of Bahr Street, even the sidewalks in smaller streets have been reduced to widen roads for cars, while pedestrians are left to fend for themselves. And, of course, cycling as a hobby has become an unpleasant adventure! I once saw Tanta as a beautiful city in my eyes as a child; it no longer feels that way. It has become a city that weighs heavily on my heart.



The iconic gate of the Andalus Zoo, facing Al-Bahr Street island (square) that exists no more. Source: Wikipedia.



The current affairs of the zoo's entrance. Source: Kafr El-Zayyat Brief News page on Facebook.



Two photographs of my memories at the zoo.



A photograph of the zoo in the stage of “neglect” that preceded enclosure (for development) and my girlfriend playing with the ostrich whose current whereabouts are unknown. My photograph.



A Peacock whose whereabouts are unknown! My Photograph.



- هي العيال بتقلع و تنزل تعوم 🤔 في نافورة بنزينة شيل  
اوت في شارع البحر؟ 🤔 دي كانت المنتزة ارحم 🤔



Tanta's kids playing in a fountain that was constructed inside the chillout gas station (Previously, the zoo). Source: social media.

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عالمين محتلين  
بين الإسلام والتبالي  
او شخص واحد ولكن  
له حياتين حياة المصد  
وحياة القاهرة

