Postfiguring degrowth: How traditional popular culture challenges growth-oriented common senses

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Abstract

Traditional customs and rituals that continue to exist in the rural peripheries of industrialized countries may contain living elements that 'postfigure' alternative ways of living. We propose a new line of inquiry on postfiguration, at the intersection between anthropology and degrowth and inspired by Antonio Gramsci's work on folklore. By 'postfiguration' we refer to real and existing popular practices with a long history that have elements that disrupt hegemonic growthist common senses. They help imagine alternative futures based on remnants of the past that continue to exist today. We follow a Gramscian understanding of traditional popular culture as a conception of the world and of life. Popular culture contains regressive and progressive elements that need to be analytically identified and separated as part of intentional postfiguration. To illustrate how specific traditions can challenge hegemonic common senses and fuel radical political imaginaries, we analyze three practices from rural Spain: "open councils", or bodies of direct democracy that have existed for centuries; "*hacenderas*", or traditional forms of work sharing; and long-existing, self-managed rural carnivals associated with convivial subversion. We propose analytics of such instances of 'postfiguration' and discuss the politics that can be built around them.

Keywords: degrowth, folklore, tradition, Gramsci, popular culture, prefiguration

Résumé

Les coutumes et rituels traditionnels qui continuent d'exister dans les périphéries des pays industrialisés peuvent contenir des éléments vivants qui « postfigurent » des modes de vie alternatifs. Nous proposons une nouvelle ligne de recherche sur la postfiguration inspirée des travaux d'Antonio Gramsci sur le folklore, à l'intersection de l'anthropologie et de la décroissance. Par « postfiguration », nous désignons des pratiques populaires réelles et existantes qui comportent des éléments qui perturbent le sens commun apparent de la croissance hégémonique. Ces pratiques aident à imaginer des mondes futurs alternatifs basés sur le passé, et dont les vestiges continuent d'exister aujourd'hui. Nous suivons une compréhension gramsienne de la culture populaire traditionnelle en tant que conception du monde et de la vie. La culture populaire contient des éléments régressifs et progressistes qui doivent être analytiquement identifiés et séparés dans le cadre d'une postfiguration intentionnelle. Pour illustrer comment des traditions spécifiques peuvent remettre en cause les idées hégémoniques *et al*imenter des imaginaires politiques radicaux, nous analysons trois pratiques de l'Espagne rurale: les « conseils ouverts », ou organes de démocratie directe qui existent depuis des siècles, les « *hacenderas* », ou formes traditionnelles de partage du travail, et des carnavals ruraux autogérés de longue date

associés à une subversion conviviale. Nous proposons une analyse de ces exemples de « postfiguration » et discutons de la manière dont le politique peut être construit autour d'elles.

Mots-clés: décroissance, folklore, tradition, Gramsci, culture populaire, préfiguration

Resumen

Las costumbres y rituales tradicionales que siguen existiendo en las periferias rurales de los países industrializados pueden contener elementos vivos que 'postfiguran' modos de vida alternativos a un futuro unilateral de crecimiento capitalista. Proponemos una nueva línea de investigación sobre la postfiguración en la intersección entre antropología y decrecimiento, inspirada en la obra de Antonio Gramsci sobre el folclore. Por 'postfiguración' nos referimos a prácticas populares reales y existentes con un largo pedigrí que tienen elementos que perturban los sentidos comunes hegemónicos del crecimiento. Estas prácticas populares ayudan a imaginar mundos futuros alternativos basados en vestigios del pasado que siguen existiendo en la actualidad. Seguimos aquí una concepción gramsciana de la cultura popular tradicional como una concepción del mundo y de la vida. Como tal, la cultura popular contiene elementos regresivos y progresivos que deben identificarse y separarse analíticamente como parte de una postfiguración intencionada. Para ilustrar cómo determinados legados tradicionales pueden alimentar imaginarios políticos radicales, analizamos tres prácticas de la España rural: los concejos abiertos, órganos de democracia directa que han existido durante siglos; las hacenderas, formas tradicionales de reparto del trabajo; y los carnavales rurales autogestionados, asociados a la subversión convivial, que han existido desde tiempos inmemoriales. Proponemos un análisis de estos ejemplos de postfiguración y debatimos cómo puede construirse lo político en torno a ellas.

Palabras clave: decrecimiento, folclore, tradición, Gramsci, cultura popular, prefiguración

1. Introduction

The relationship between old and new, tradition and modernity, and nostalgia and projection is present, implicitly or explicitly, in socioecological transition and transformation projects, including the object of our study here, degrowth (Schmelzer *at al.*, 2022; Demaria *et al.*, 2013). Tradition, however, is often undertheorized and its role in transition underestimated, reproducing problematic and politically impotent binaries between a past long gone and a future yet to come.

Within the transition literature, so-called prefigurative practices – practices of "anticipating or representing something that will happen in the future" (Monticelli 2021, 106) – are often highlighted as important levers for imagining and enacting a different future. In the prefiguration literature, that future tends to be imagined as a post-capitalist one and the practices studied challenge and transcend contemporary capitalism right now (Monticelli 2021, 107). Empirical studies of degrowth often revolve around such prefigurative examples –frequently associated with urban settings such as cooperatives, shared parenting groups, urban gardens, social currencies, time banks, open-source software, and social movement assemblies (D'Alisa *et al.*, 2014). These usually involve activist subjects with a certain degree of political consciousness. Prefiguration is seen as part of 'intersticial strategies' of transformation, which create the necessary cultural base for more 'ruptural' strategies to emerge and create new institutions, or at least change 'symbiotically' existing institutions towards more eco-social directions (Wright, 2010, Chertkovskaya, 2022, Kallis *et al.*, 2020).

There is limited engagement, on the other hand, with a different set of pre-existing practices captured by anthropological concepts such as traditional culture, folklore, local and traditional knowledge or intangible heritage. Given their pre-capitalist origin, these may do the same work as newer post-capitalist practices, in terms of opening the imagination, and demonstrating the viability of alternatives in the interstices of capitalist worlds. What better proof of viability can one find than the lengthy existence and persistence of such practices despite the continuous growth of capitalist economies? We call such traditional practices that can prefigure alternative futures as 'postfigurative' (our term) – i.e. really existing popular practices with a long history, that have elements that disrupt hegemonic growth-ist common senses and that open possibilities towards imagining and enacting alternative post-capitalist, degrowth futures.

Postfiguration is strongly linked to what anthropologists call 'traditional popular culture', those "socially acquired ways of thinking, feeling and acting" (Harris, 1988, 136) including vernacular forms of organization

of work, governance and celebration, with a long history and rooted in the collective imagination of a community. We specifically consider how living traditional popular culture is present in the West and how it might inform thinking on degrowth. We focus on the West (or 'Global North') because degrowth is explicitly positioned as a project of the North for the North: a process of decolonization at the heart of the colonizing project (Kallis *et al.*, 2020). Our premise is that inspiration from indigenous worldviews need not be searched for only in a non-Western 'other', but can be found also within rooted, living traditions of the West itself. We are inspired here by a group of Mediterranean anthropologists who have taken an interest in popular culture, based on Gramsci's prison notes on folklore (Feixa, 2008).

The term 'popular culture', long central to anthropological debates, fell into disuse before being recently recuperated in more radical directions (Giménez, 2017; Alabarces, 2021). This was part of a reaction against the shift of interest towards "intangible cultural heritage" since the 1990s and within the framework of UNESCO's efforts to preserve elements of non-material culture in the face of a changing world (Carvajal Contreras, 2020). The concept of heritage has been criticized for excluding humble cultural expressions that do not conform to mainstream moral values, for sometimes implying its management can happen only at the nation-state level, and for unleashing problematic processes, such as touristification and commodification, that undermine the very purpose of preservation (Mármol *et al.*, 2010; Brumann, 2018; Stowkowski, 2009; Santamarina & Mármol, 2020). A popular culture studies revival follows recent critiques. The Catalan Institute of Anthropology (ICA), for example, aimed to reclaim popular culture's subversive and counter-hegemonic aspects at its 2022 conference (Delgado *et al.*, 2022; ICA, 2022). This article is motivated by this resurgence of popular culture and attempts to establish a dialogue between these new currents in anthropology and the communities that study radical socioecological transitions such as degrowth.

We begin by providing a theoretical framework for understanding traditional popular culture, and hence postfiguration, though the lenses of Antonio Gramsci (Section 2), before discussing how degrowth can benefit from a better understanding and integration of traditional popular culture (Section 3). Section 4 proposes an analytics of postfiguration as a form of cultural litigation and of distinguishing desirable from undesirable elements of tradition. We present three examples from the Spanish countryside to illustrate how this analytics of postfiguration can be applied, paying special attention to the limitations of these practices (Section 5). We conclude by reflecting on what postfigurative politics could look like, in our effort to think of a research and praxis that draws elements from the past and from tradition in order to shape the future (Section 6).

2. Traditional popular culture in Gramscian thought

Antonio Gramsci's (1891-1937) most influential concepts such as hegemony and counter-hegemony have been addressed in relation to political ecology (Ekers *et al.* 2009), but his specific views on folklore are less known. Here we focus on four pages on Gramsci's *Osservazioni sul folklore* ([1950] 1985) – which close the fourth volume of his "Prison Notebooks", written in 1935 and published in 1950 – and are central in the analytical current in Mediterranean anthropology that is reviving the concept of popular culture.[2] Gramsci defined folklore – popular culture – as a "conception of the world and life" in "opposition" to hegemonic culture, that is "'official' conceptions of the world", which are, "for the most part, implicit, mechanical, and objective" (Gramsci, [1950] 1985, 189). Gramsci's writings helped reconceptualize traditions not as isolated elements frozen in the past, but as a complex conception of the world full of contradictions: they belonging to the present, in constant change and with important implications for processes of social change (Juliano, 1986, 12; Feixa, 2008; Contreras & Prat, 1981, 64).

A central concept in the Gramscian lexicon, "conception of world and of life", refers to "things that inform our understanding of the world and our place in it" (Wainwright, 2010, 507). For Gramsci, everyone has

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[2] Gramsci's comments on folklore also had a significant though minor impact on the Anglo-Saxon anthropology (Dundes, 1999; Limón, 1983), even though his larger body of work was very influential. More recently, Gramsci has been called a "vital interlocutor for contemporary folklorists" within the emerging field of "critical folklore studies" in the US (Gencarella, 2010). Gramsci also significantly influenced authors such as Raymond Williams, whose work laid the foundations for the field of cultural studies and the study of subcultures.

a conception of the world, and, in this sense, he argues, "everyone is already a philosopher (albeit unconsciously) to the extent that language, folklore and common sense provide an inherent conception of the world" (Wainwright, 2010, 509). Folklore, then, can be seen as the "philosophy of non-philosophers" (Gramsci, 1971, 419), the "spontaneous philosophy" of people (Gramsci, 1971, 323), an "entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting" (Gramsci, 1971, 325), that is "characteristic of the subaltern classes" and "in opposition to official conceptions" (Cirese, 1982, 215).

Gramsci expressed the need to examine the cultural aspects of peasant and less affluent communities, a task that sparked considerable energy and enthusiasm by the Italian left-wing intellectuals of his time. However, Gramsci's perspective on folklore presented a paradox. He simultaneously elevated folklore as a worldview worthy of serious study on the one hand and on the other, characterized it as something provincial and reactionary that needed to be uprooted from the peasantry and replaced with 'superior' ideas through education (Dei, 2008, 456; Petronio, 1987, 86-87; Crehan, 2022; Byrne, 1982). Gramsci, one should note, was aware that popular culture was not a systematic and homogeneous whole. He saw it rather as an eclectic, complex and even contradictory "confused[3] agglomerate of fragments of all the conceptions of the world and of life that have succeeded one another in history." "Only in folklore", he argued, "one finds surviving evidence, adulterated and mutilated, of the majority of these conceptions" (Gramsci [1950] 1985, 189). Thus, "bizarre combinations" can be found in which "certain conceptions specific to folklore remain even after these conditions have been (or seem to be) modified" (Gramsci [1950] 1985, 190).

This vision of culture as dynamic, unsystematic, and heterogeneous led Gramsci to formulate what would become a key idea for a Gramscian anthropological current: that tradition can contain different "strata." It is possible and necessary, Gramsci writes, given a "morality of the people," to differentiate between "fossilized [strata], which reflect conditions of past life and are therefore conservative and reactionary, and those which consist of a series of innovations, often creative and progressive, determined spontaneously by forms and conditions of life which are in the process of developing and which are in contradiction to or simply different from the morality of the governing strata" (Gramsci [1950] 1985, 190). Tradition, by this reading, can have innovative elements different from or contradictory to the dominant order and hegemonic common sense.

Common sense here is defined as the "uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become 'common' in any given epoch" (Gramsci, 1971, 322). Dominant groups in society maintain their dominance by ensuring the "spontaneous consent" of subordinate groups through hegemonic common sense (Strinati, 2004, p. 153). As D'Alisa and Kallis (2020, 6) explain "Gramsci uses common senses in plural (…) to emphasize that in any given time and society common people hold different, taken-for-granted ideas." Counter-hegemonic groups can reinterpret, reorder and change social reality by mobilizing dormant common senses through their practical embodiment and performance in everyday life (Garcia-Lopez *et al.*, 2017).

While much of the literature, such as the case study by Garcia-Lopez *et al.* mentioned above, focus on how contemporary practices can challenge common senses by prefiguring post-capitalist worlds, Gramsci's work on popular culture, as recuperated by Mediterranean anthropologists, remind us that traditional practices too can embody certain common senses that challenge the hegemony of a given time and hence create openings for political and institutional change – what we call here 'postfiguration.' Ernesto de Martino ([1951] 2008) coined the term "progressive folklore" to capture this idea. Ethnology, for de Martino, should have the task of identifying and differentiating those elements "without possible return" from those that "allude to the future," "so that practical-political action can benefit from this knowledge to combat the former and favor the latter, or at least give a new and progressive meaning to the archaic elements" (de Martino, 2008, 101). This in sum is the objective of degrowth studies of postfiguration: identifying and differentiating elements in traditional popular culture that speak to degrowth, a first and necessary step towards developing postfigurative politics (we return to this in the concluding section).

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[3] Although in the English translation the word "confused" is used, the literal translation is "indigestible" agglomerate.

3. Degrowth and tradition

Degrowth is based on the idea that unlimited capitalist growth constitutes one of the central forms of domination under which multiple other forms of injustice are perpetuated. Beginning with a multidimensional critique of growth – ecological, socio-economic, cultural, feminist, and decolonial (Schmelzer *et al*., 2022) – degrowth proposes a transition to a socio-economic system in which the production and consumption of energy and materials is drastically reduced as the quality of life improves. This process involves dismantling the common sense and culture of growth (D'Alisa & Kallis, 2020, Meissner, 2021), and dissociating 'progress' from growth in the collective imaginary (Latouche, 1996). Gramsci understood official culture to be that of the ruling class. Here, we focus on one aspect of this ruling culture, that is, its foundation on the common senses of (capitalist) growth (Table 1). Degrowth signals a complex mosaic of common senses that run against the hegemonic common senses of the growth culture.

Growth	Degrowth
faster	slower
individual	collective
expansion	limits
affluence	frugal abundance
austerity	*dépense* (collective unproductive spending)
efficiency	sufficiency
private property	commons
market	community
owning	sharing
leisure	conviviality
material goods	relational goods
liberal democracy	direct democracy

Table 1: Common senses of growth vis-à-vis common senses of degrowth.

Degrowth, as Table 1 shows, offers a matrix (Latouche, 1996) or 'vocabulary' (D'Alisa *et al*, 2014) of alternative conceptions of the world, which in their interconnection point to an alternative, post-capitalist future. This future is characterized by a slower pace of life and a reduced speed of production, consumption, and resource extraction; sufficiency – recognizing the presence and value of limits and the priority of satisfying human needs; 'frugal abundance', where abundance is achieved by sufficiency not expansion; a mode of organization prioritizing collective action around the reclaiming of the commons by communities, and practices of sharing, rather than owning, dividing and accumulating – which points to more direct, rather than representative, modes of decision-making; and finally an importance on social relations and the value they produce, especially so-called convivial relations and the various forms societies have found over the centuries

to spend their surpluses together and find joy (*dépense*). These imaginaries of 'simple, together' are not new – they have a long pedigree in all societies and can be traced in ancient and indigenous, Eastern and Western philosophies, religions, spiritual schools and ways of living. They can disrupt common senses that are hegemonic under capitalist culture: common senses of speed and efficiency, individuality and property, competition, and constant expansion. We understand degrowth here not only as a political or (political ecological) economic project, but also as a cultural one (Paulson, 2017; Meissner, 2021).

Whereas Meissner (2021) opened important ground to rethink the links between modern mass culture and degrowth, this article contributes to exploring how *traditions* within popular culture may also be a source of common senses, and hence of a politics of degrowth. Works prior to ours have started placing the degrowth imaginary in dialogue with the past. Kallis and March (2014, 362) for example argue that "degrowth reads the capitalist present as full of latent elements of a non-capitalist past, such as the gift economies of barter markets or the commons." Historian Mathias Schmelzer has linked anti-growth thinking in the West to explicit and organized resistances since the early Modern Age, such as peasants' resistance to deforestation, Luddites' resistance to mass production and rural communities defense of communal land (Schmelzer, 2022, 10-11). However, practices derived from implicit, unconscious, unsystematic, and unorganized "conceptions of life" (Gramsci [1950] 1985, 189) have not yet been addressed so much in an empirical way. We refer to practices that, without having explicitly manifested themselves against growth, imply direct ruptures with its logics and offer alternatives to them.

A few exceptions stand out. Bogadóttir and Skarðhamar Olsen (2017) explore from a degrowth perspective the centuries-old local tradition of whaling for food purposes in the Faroe Islands (*Føroyar*). Kallis *et al.* (2022) link traditional values of slowness, moderation, and conviviality on two Greek islands with real existing, albeit imperfect, degrowth practices. Gezon (2017) shows that the practice in Madagascar of chewing *khat* with friends and associates – considered by supporters of development to be detrimental to growth – is a crucial subsistence mechanism leading to reciprocal social obligations. All this political ecology research indicates, using the words of anthropologist Susan Paulson, that "paths to more sustainable lifestyles do not need to depend solely on the invention of new imaginaries, but can also value and leverage social practices and cognitive orientations that have long existed, but that have been disdained as irrational or immoral, or perhaps fallen below the radar altogether, in mainstream economic analysis" (Paulson 2017, 434). This is the body of literature to which our analytical framework of postfiguration contributes.

Specifically, we argue that within traditional popular culture there are principles and practices rooted in the same common senses currently being claimed by the degrowth movement, and that these represent existing alternatives to the growth-oriented model of the organization of life. Traditional practices therefore have a prefigurative potential, what we call postfiguration, as they are typical of pre-capitalist formations, and persist through informal transmission across generations. The very fact of their continuous existence is evidence of the viability of what they represent, while their mass appeal offers the opportunity for degrowth politics to reach out beyond its standard audience (see Meissner, 2021).

What is politically important here is that traditional popular cultural practices are not necessarily sustained out of a conscious political impulse (see Meissner, 2021). Often, they are embedded in everyday common sense without the need for an ideology or activist consciousness. There has been a long debate among Mediterranean anthropologists concerning the "revolutionary potential of traditional culture" (Feixa, 2008, 24) and the subversive potential of popular culture, "under its inoffensive appearance," to question official conceptions of the world, "sometimes consciously and explicitly, but more often unconsciously and implicitly" (Juliano, 1986, 8). A key proposition here is that, by its very existence and persistence, popular culture can be subversive as it refutes the universalist pretension of official culture by demonstrating that there are heterogeneous ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. It represents, then, the presence of long-lasting alternatives to the purportedly universal validity of the growth model by embodying common senses in opposition to it, such as slowing down, direct democracy, sharing, conviviality, relational goods, and *dépense*.

This argument is similar to one made by the feminist economic geographers Gibson-Graham (2006) who, through the study of an extraordinary diversity of non-capitalist economic praxis, refute the universality of capitalism. In addition to those practices that consciously resist, subordinate, or complement capitalism, we

are interested here in those rooted in tradition and passed on informally between generations as the natural or customary way of doing things, for two reasons. First, in line with Gibson-Graham, understanding these common senses as existing everywhere and in less visible spaces – beyond those of social movements and prefigurative spaces that work with more explicit political discourses – allows us to overcome prevalent ideas about the complete dominance of capitalism. Second, traditional popular culture seems a good place to observe the role that the transmission of cultural heritage, identity, community, and sense of belonging can play among the various motivations that people may have to move outside capitalist logics. This helps overcome a somewhat dominant approach in environmental studies in which change is assumed to emanate from rational scientific advances or politicized behavioral change.

4. An analytics of postfiguration: Cultural litigation of the strata of tradition

The Gramscian idea of tradition as harboring different strata, progressive and conservative, raises questions related to who decides which strata are desirable and which are undesirable. Postfiguration requires someone to do such a postfiguring – an analyst (or in some cases an activist) who highlights the progressive elements of a traditional practice. However, from a degrowth standpoint that extensively questions developmentalism and the ideology of progress (Schmelzer *et al.* 2022, 143-157, 159-169), the distinction between progressive and conservative strata can be difficult to maintain. Here, we adopt ideas from the literature on social movements (Della Porta, 2022, 4) which understands the term "progressive" as "the liberation (or 'emancipation') of collectivities (…), whether liberation from misery, from ignorance, from exploitative relations, or the freedom of such collectivities to govern themselves autonomously, i.e., without depending on or being controlled by others" (Offe, 2011, 79-80). Degrowth can be seen, then, as a progressive project against the hegemony of the official culture of growth.

There are unfortunately numerous examples in which tradition has served as a foothold for groups with xenophobic or exclusionary right-wing ideologies. To cite just one of them, the Swedish far right uses cultural heritage (Nilsson, 2022) as well as folk music (Kaminsky, 2012) as part of a nationalist and anti-immigrant agenda. However, Spanish poet Fruela Fernández contends that whether a popular practice is conservative or progressive depends on its usage and context, as shown in the case of traditional dances: once symbols of national-Catholicism during the Franco era, they can today carry radical political connotations, reclaiming public squares and fostering joyful and decommodified relationships (Fernández, 2019, 25-26). Our argument then is not that tradition can cease to be attractive to regressive or even reactionary purposes, but that different strata of tradition can be, under certain conditions and forms, mobilized as imaginaries by and for degrowth.

Given the lack of an explicit activist motivation behind most traditions, we argue that they cannot be seen as inherently progressive or conservative without a political evaluative framework. As Alabarces (2021, 152) notes: "according to certain normative criteria, we will be able to evaluate to what extent a popular practice (...) is constituted as more or less resistant, deviant, heretical or transgressive. Such an assessment can only appear in relation to a normativity, which is necessarily political." The elements that are considered desirable or inspiring will depend, then, on the transition perspective from which a traditional popular culture is viewed and on concrete manifestations of mobilizing that potential. In other words, treating tradition as inspiring for a degrowth transition has a normative character and an empirical dimension, to the extent that today specific collectives are mobilizing them in this direction.

Trying to address this same challenge, Spanish anthropologist Antonio Montesino (1951-2015) proposed a "discerning and critically reflexive" anthropology whose activity should be "cultural litigation" (*litigar culturalmente* in Spanish) (Montesino, 2004, 512). In law, to litigate is to make something the subject of a lawsuit: to have a case decided and resolved in a court of law. The reference here is to an anthropology that is not detached or purely descriptive but that engages in a process of discernment and separation of the different elements of tradition, and thereby presenting arguments for the selective vindication and reinterpretation of progressive, emancipatory strata. The aim would be to "rescue and update those forms, values and meanings of the traditional legacies that can continue to be useful and convenient" for emancipation (2004, 414). Simply put, it is a kind of anthropology that, given its commitment to an emancipatory project, functions as a 'court of law' regarding traditions.

In the case of degrowth, the twelve principles of degrowth listed in Table 1 could be used to guide this cultural litigation and offer the basis for an analysis of postfiguration. The very basic framework we propose below is one whereby we, the analysts, trace in popular cultural practices the strata that represent degrowth common senses and explain how these disrupt the growthist common senses that prevail elsewhere. Next we identify the political potential of these practices, and finally the less desirable ('conservative') elements that may be harbored in the same practices.

5. Three examples of traditions in Spain that postfigure degrowth

Three traditional popular practices present in Spain are analyzed here to illustrate how concrete traditions can postfigure radical political imaginaries aligned with degrowth: namely, *concejos abiertos* (open councils), *hacenderas* (work-sharing arrangements) and carnivals. These, we will argue, challenge growth-oriented common senses in three spheres that are important from a degrowth perspective: governance, work and celebration. We ask, first, how these practices challenge dominant common senses, and second, whether and how they inspire political projects as well as their limitations. Our approach can be considered as a first, rough proposal on how to study postfiguration.

The three cases studies presented here provide evidence of widespread cultural phenomena that have occurred in many cultures and at different times under other names, and in slightly different forms. For example, there are multiple traditional assembly structures, such as councils, worldwide (García Espín, 2021, 43), including the "town meetings" of North American New England (Mansbridge, 1983; Zimmerman, 1999; Bryan, 2010; Townsend, 2009), the Germanic "*Landsgemeinde*" (Asatryan *et al*., 2014) and the Colombian "*cabildos abiertos*" (Finot, 2001; Orduña, 1994). Latin American "*mingas*" follow a logic similar to that of the *hacenderas*, and in Chiloé (Chile) they have been "at the heart of the anticolonial resistance" (Cabaña & Linares, 2022). Similarly, carnival is a worldwide cultural phenomenon (Crowley, 1956; Heers, 1983; Gaignebet, 1984; Cardini, 1984; Riggio, 2019; Gómez Montañez, 2020). The cases proposed here are not unique. Approached with a logic of the "extended case" (Burawoy, 2009), they focus on practices that serve as anchors for the multiplicity of similar practices elsewhere, extracting "the general from the unique" and connecting "the present to the past in anticipation of the future" (Burawoy, 2009, 21).

Our empirical material is drawn mainly from pre-existing literature on the issues, complemented by primary research by the first author. For open councils, we rely on the only systematic published ethnography located in the Basque country (García Espín, 2021) and complement it with three interviews with an expert in open council legislation and members of two associations dedicated to the recovery of open councils – La Bardal in Cantabria and Stop Expolio de los Bienes Comunales in León. For *hacenderas*, we combine data from an ethnographic work in Segovia (Spain) (Arranz López, 2015; 2017) with secondary sources (Rentería-Uriarte & Las Heras, 2019; Marganto, 2017) and an interview with an *hacendera* organizer in the village of Beleña de Sorbe (Guadalajara, Spain). For carnivals, we base our analysis on ethnographic data gathered by the first author between May 2021 and February 2022 in two villages in northwest Spain: Velilla de la Reina (León, Spain) and Laza (Ourense, Spain) (Muñoz-Sueiro and Aparicio, 2022; Slow Projects 2021; Muñoz-Sueiro, 2022).

Open Councils: Re-imagining governance

> Only by legislating 'under the tree' is law made
> Caro Baroja, Julio (1989, 36)

> I don't remember where I read an Indian story that explained that all natural things have a shadow or spirit. The first image that came to my mind was of those trees in so many towns and villages – strawberry, yew, elm tree – under which for so long life has never ceased to happen: key sites for the celebration of councils and neighborhood meetings; a primordial root from which the main decisions of the place were taken.
> Sánchez, María (2021, 300)

Open councils are decision-making mechanisms in Spain that typically take place in rural villages and whose origins date to the 10th century (Orduña, 1988, 827). They are institutions of "pure direct democracy" (Barber, 1974; Cosculluela, 1987, 202); they consist of an elected mayor and a neighborhood assembly, which are open to all residents of legal age who meet at least once every three months (although women were often excluded in the past as we explain below) (García Espín, 2021, 47). The councils adopt binding decisions without the mediation of political parties on matters such as public works, cultural and leisure activities, communal property, and basic services. Included in the 1978 Constitution and subsequently regulated by Ley 7/1985, they became mandatory for all municipalities with less than one hundred inhabitants and for those municipalities that had traditionally open councils, regardless of their size (Salanova, 2009, 196). Spain has 1,375 municipalities with less than 100 residents (as of 2021) (INE, 2021). With a 2011 change in law, open councils were no longer mandatory (Pueyo Moy, 2011), although around 1,000 open councils still remained ten years ago (Boyano Sotillo, 2014).

Dominant common senses challenged by open councils

Open councils challenge the hegemonic institutional form of liberal democracy. They do this by the mere fact of their existence and by offering a functioning alternative consistent with degrowth values of commons, community and direct democracy (see Table 1). Open councils have the advantage compared to more recent experiments with assemblies and direct democracy that they are institutionalized and have a long history, involving participants from the general population, not just dedicated activists as is the case with the social movements, cooperatives and occupied squares often celebrated from a degrowth perspective (Asara *et al.*, 2013, Varvarousis *et al.* 2020). In open councils, direct democracy is a daily reality for common people, stimulating engagement with political life, even though participants are not necessarily working for a political project.

In representative democracy, citizens are mostly constrained to voting for representatives; in open councils instead, participants develop a range of skills through their regular participation and rotation in positions of responsibility (García Espín, 2021). They form opinions, learn how to debate and cooperate and develop empathy for fellow citizens as well as learn how to listen, speak and negotiate in public. Participants can be administrators of the councils – such as presidents, spokesperson or secretaries – and in these roles they cultivate capacities for self-organizing a group and facilitating debate and decisions, by participating in work commissions, council members organize festivities, popular meals, educational and leisure events (García Espín, 2021, 61). In other words, they become capable and active citizens, as is the ideal of direct democracy.

Ethnographic research (García Espín, 2021) highlights that those who participate in councils enjoy the recognition, the socialization and the making of friends (all 'relational goods' and aspects of 'conviviality' in the more theoretical terminology of Table 1). One participant asserted that "many people get involved in assemblies with the expectation of organizing activities to have fun, meet other residents, make friends or weave bonds of mutual support" (García Espín, 2021, 185). Informants talked of a "good atmosphere, being on good terms, getting along well, as well as making friends, integrating, getting to know the people, the environment, taking care of what is ours, knowing all that makes you feel part of it" (García Espín, 2021, 176-181). These speak to degrowthist common senses of collective, relational and convivial goods and against the prevalent common senses around individualized material possessions (see Table 1). Doing politics together, as part of friendship, might seem minor, but is in fact disruptive of the detached logic of liberal democracy at the heart of growth economies, where individuals are workers most of the time (or leisure consumers in their free time), and voters who once every four years perform a 'duty.' By linking political participation with friendship, cooperation and the satisfaction of common needs, open councils also challenge the dominant perception of politics as a technical domain of experts. An ethnography of councils in the Basque territory offers several examples of how council participants take matters in their own hands, speaking to degrowth principles of commons and direct democracy:

> …the mushroom or medicinal herb gathering enthusiast shares these skills with his neighbors, receiving gratitude and recognition. The physical education teacher, concerned about the shortage of sports facilities, transforms his concern into a proposal for a gymnastic route with machines in a local park. Likewise, the (perceived) scarcity of relationship spaces lead some to plan meetings after the assembly, in the community bar or in the agreed activities (festivals, popular meals, sidewalks, etc.) (García Espín, 2021, 186)

Potential and limitations of the different strata of open councils

The political relevance of open councils extends beyond their physical borders. Links are developing, as new forms of direct government and mobilization emerged in Spain after the 15M ('*indignados*') movement occupied squares in 2011. The movement *Stop Expolio de los Bienes Comunales* (Stop Plundering Communal Goods) that formed in 2013 from the occupied town squares aims to make existing councils visible and create new ones as a horizontal model of neighborhood self-government. The movement links the establishment of councils with the fight against new enclosures and sees councils as part of a political horizon supporting local economies based on the commons, with care and respect for the environment; a multi-systemic discourse very similar to, although not explicitly linked with, degrowth.

However, while disturbing certain dominant common senses, some traditions can also reinforce others. Returning to the Gramscian idea of traditions as complex cultural agglomerations with different strata, we find in the councils a historical patriarchal dimension: in the past, they only involved male heads of households, accepting women only in the case of widows (García Espín, 2021, 117-119). Today, this legacy sometimes remains informally. As rural sociologist and agroecological cattle rancher, María Montesino, daughter of the abovementioned anthropologist, recollects, the open council at Fresno del Río (Cantabria), where she lives, refuse to allocate her the portion of communal land that corresponded where her cattle grazed, possibly because of prejudice towards a female environmentalist rancher, who was not originally from the community. In her own words:

> …they understand that the communal land belongs to the community, yes, but to their community of equals (fundamentally men, born in the village, lifelong cattle ranchers, administrators of the commons, guardians of the "customs of always") (Montesino, 2021, 59).

It was the judicial system that finally confirmed her rights. This case shows the ambivalence of traditions, in which patriarchal schemes and closure to outsiders is mingled with direct democracy and self-governing for insiders. It is not too far-fetched to imagine a more regressive reading of the councils as self-governed and self-sufficient examples of the good old Spain, effectively run by Spanish men.

An example of how to deal strategically with the regressive layers of tradition is offered by the organization La Bardal (Cantabria, Spain), composed of young people who work to regenerate participatory governance in rural areas. They are recovering open councils and linking them to ecosystem protection. Being in a very politically divided rural area, where conservatives predominate, and environmental concerns are usually associated with urbanites who know nothing of the countryside, the association looked for a theme that would unite everyone across the board around the council: bringing internet to the village. From this common need, the council was reborn, transforming the way neighbors related to each other and made decisions:

> We realized that the environment was not a priority for local people. It was important to find something that brought everyone together. Internet coverage was the starting shot to restructure the open council (...), this bottom-up decision-making system which generated links between neighbors who did not speak to each other before. Now we can use the trust that we have generated to work on environmental issues.

La Bardal reclaimed tradition while advancing it, addressing for instance the reduced participation of women by using new tools of facilitation and moderation that were not present in the past, and which allow under-represented voices, such as those of women, to be heard.

Hacenderas*: re-imagining work*

> *auzolan* in Basque (…), *facendera* in Leonese, *sestaferia* in Asturian, (…). All these words and expressions (…) refer to communal work, hands, and bodies of rural environments that take care and help. A natural way of sharing, of getting together, of working to carry out many tasks in the countryside, in the village, in the pastures or in the orchards of the rural environments, which were the ones that fed and made our villages beat and breathe.
> Sánchez, María (2020, 178)

The *hacenderas* are a traditional practice of work-sharing through which needs are met collaboratively, on many occasions ending with a celebration or community gathering. Coming from the verb *hacer* (to do), they historically involved community work related to the maintenance and repair of common goods, such as roads, paths, bridges, fountains and watercourses (they should not be confused with Mexican 'haciendas', which refer to colonial landlord estates of mixed crop-livestock production). At times obligatory and sometimes optional, *hacenderas* were based on the premise of building, repairing, and maintaining something together for the benefit of all. As a 67-year-old informant in Segovia (Spain) shares:

> …everyone went together to fix the roads and watercourses and then had a snack. Everyone was happy because it was a common good, no one skipped out... It was altruistic, and it was a good for others... and people had a good time. (Arranz López, 2017, 60)

On other occasions, some families could convene a *hacendera* for tasks that they could not do alone, asking for community help with a logic of *hoy por ti, mañana por mi* (today you, tomorrow me) (Caro Baroja, [1949] 2009, 208).

Although the general perception is that *hacenderas* are in decline (Arranz López, 2017, 62), they are in fact making a comeback in some very small villages (Marganto, 2017) of the so-called 'emptied Spain', a term popularized to denote rural depopulation. The persistence of *hacenderas* there is associated with the neglect small villages experience from the larger municipal authorities to which they belong. As a member of the neighbors' association of Beleña de Sorbe (Guadalajara, Spain), a village of only 12 permanent residents, explained:

> …it is work that is done out of affection and love for your village that you see has needs that no one is going to cover, because the city council does the minimum and not even that. Either we fix the fountain ourselves or it collapses. Some people could think 'I pay my taxes, the town hall has to do that' but nothing comes from there; we must do it ourselves. Tradition helps here because you get a foothold in it and you can explain what that was for before, and then you transfer it to modern times and current needs.

Usually convened through open councils, the focus of *hacenderas* has shifted from servicing infrastructure to community services, such as cleaning, restoring and creating spaces for festivals and other cultural events. If an open council oversees the management of the commons, the *hacendera* is the mechanism for the maintenance of the commons (Rentería-Uriarte & Las Heras Cuenca, 2019, 225), thus producing what has been called a "commons ecology" (Ruiz Cayuela, 2021) in which different institutions of commons function in an interconnected way.

Dominant common senses challenged by the hacenderas

The *hacenderas* can be understood as an "institutionalized form of reciprocity" (Ott, 1993, 213 in Echevarria, 2016, 185), that challenges the hegemonic common sense of individualized labor (and in relation, commodified in the form of wages). In *hacenderas*, work takes place without exchange of money, outside the market. Considered by some as "a feast of collaboration" (Arránz López, 2017, 5), *hacenderas* turn individual work into collective work. It is in this sense that they can be understood as counterhegemonic practices aligned with one of the key pillars of degrowth: sharing (Table 1), including the "sharing of work, public space, living space, resources and expertise" (Kallis, 2018, 119).

Hacenderas give work "a more playful approach [...], a spirit of harmony and fellowship among participants" (Arránz López, 2017, 28). For example, in a tree-planting *hacendera* in a village in Segovia, different generations came together in a ludic, festive ambience concluding with a collective meal in a public space (Maganto, 2017, 12-13). The joy of the *hacenderas* breaks down the separation between work and leisure, a breakdown that underpins many degrowth arguments against alienation (Mair *et al*., 2020; Gómez-Baggethun, 2023). As degrowth scholar Tim Parrique states:

> for those who engage in community activities autonomously (…), the difference between work and play disappears, like in the 'ludic society' utopia described by Bob Black in *The Abolition of Work* (1985) (Parrique, 2019, 627).

In sum, *hacenderas* symbolize an institutionalized form of communal work based on joy and sharing, a conception of work that differs from and that can potentially disrupt the hegemonic, individualized, competitive form of waged work that is always distinct from leisure.

Potential and limitations of the different strata of hacenderas

Although the political relevance of the *hacenderas* may be less obvious than that of the open councils, the material and imaginary transformations they open up can be seen through some concrete examples of their recovery or reinterpretation. The project *Haciendo Hacenderas* (Doing Hacenderas), for example, carried out by Segovia's 'peasant schools' and the 'enProceso' cooperative, promoted the recovery of *hacenderas* in the province of Segovia as a strategy for community revitalization in 2015 (Arranz López, 2015). Children and teenagers identified the needs of their villages by interviewing elders, provoking an intergenerational dialogue of unmet needs, and then convened a *hacendera* to respond themselves to these needs, boosting the recovery of *hacenderas* in other localities in the region (Maganto, 2017, 13). There are similar initiatives to recuperate *hacenderas* linked to environmental education (Alzueta, 2014; Arranz Lopez, 2015; Maganto, 2017). The National Center for Environmental Education (Valsaín, Segovia), for example, convened nine *hacenderas* to place nesting boxes for birds in forests, collect photos of animals and plants, and to encourage citizen involvement in biodiversity protection in this way (Maganto, 2017, 13). The cooperative Sestaferia.net ('*sestaferia*' is the Asturian word for '*hacendera*'), is another example: this cooperative builds free, open, and self-managed internet networks in isolated villages with the slogan "if the networks do not reach you, build your own network." In the Basque Country, *auzolán* (*hacendera*) have inspired new ways of viewing the economy through the lens of solidarity, relating "symbolic features of Basque culture" to new forms of sharing economies, according to Rentería-Uriarte and Las Heras (2019, 224-229).

Hacenderas are also good places from which to reflect on the limitations of traditional popular culture in modern societies: to what extent do they represent an alternative to dominant common senses when the traditional society in which this practice was inserted has been completely transformed? To what extent, to use Gramscian terms, does this "fragment" of a "conception of the world" no longer dominant, this "surviving evidence, adulterated and mutilated" (Gramsci, [1950]1985, 189) of the traditional society, have the strength to challenge dominant common senses? Most people involved in *hacenderas* devote the majority of their working time, like everyone else, to wage labour. While *hacenderas* in the past could last up to three days and happen quite often, now a *hacendera* is usually done in a few hours once a month, every several months or in some

places, only once a year (Arránz López, 2017, 63), assuming a more symbolic than a material function. In some of these *hacenderas*, advanced agricultural machinery is now used (Arránz López, 2017, 63), prioritizing efficiency over conviviality or sufficiency. Finally, although in most cases *hacenderas* function as a vehicle for inclusion, in some instances there have been difficulties in integrating immigrants or neo-rural settlers, giving rise to conflicts (Arránz López, 2017, 68-89).

The argument is not, then, that *hacenderas* are a materialized model for degrowth. Rather, the argument is that to the extent that this ancient practice of decommodified, collective and convivial work still survives in certain places and contexts, it can serve as inspiration for reimagining alternative work models based on sharing and communal cooperation.

Carnival: Re-imagining 'leisure'

> (...) Playful and boisterous crowds, I invoke you! So that in the days of Carnival you may live in the streets and squares of a magical time of celebration, joy and fraternity. Make possible, together, a utopian world, upside down, where there is no puppet without comedy. Let the child be an old man, the old man a baby, the woman a man, the man a woman, the chaste... impure and the pure... tobacco! Let the demons become mocking angels and the angels guardians of hell. (...) We are all flesh; we are all Carnival. A celebration that the people know how to give to themselves, with the strength of their historical immortality. Let this be a collective proclamation of rightful amusement; an act of living popular culture, of comic forms, not only to escape, but to carry out a festive action, created and enjoyed by a city that aspires to a historical time of freedom.
>
> Proclamation of the 1983 carnival in Santander, written by Antonio Montesino and read by Pío Fernández Muriedas from a lamppost
>
> Cuende & Montesino (2003, 14)

Carnival is a festivity associated with inversion of the dominant social order. Located between Christmas and Easter, carnival has been described as "a period of intense passion" (Caro Baroja, 1979), "the feast of feasts" (Roma, 1980), "a moment of emotional togetherness or *communitas*" (Burke, 2000, 192) as well as "a period of creative and life-generating chaos", "an allegory of the spirit of abundance" and "a ritual of inversion of daily life" (Prat i Carós, 1993). Carnivals offer a "special state of personal and collective catharsis that transgresses daily routines and generates fullness and transcendence" (Hernàndez, 2022).

Carnivals were repressed for their excesses during medieval times, being historically opposed to the Church's established period of Lent (Ehrenreich, 2008). According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1974), the scholar of reference for the medieval "feasts of fools", the lower classes inverted social hierarchy and occupied the places of prestige in fictitious carnival hierarchies. This popular cultural event confronted the dominant powers of the state and the church by contravening norms, inverting privileges and mocking social taboos (Prat i Carós, 1993, 289). If, in Bakhtin's view, the carnival meant for the upper classes "an indulgence for the masses, a chance for them to play the fool and give vent to their base and sinful nature," for the lower classes the grotesque element, the joke and the laughter were "a kind of universal solvent of hierarchy" (Graeber, 2007, 29-30). From the sixteenth century on, some carnivals ended in violent revolts and uprisings against power (Berce, 1976; Burke, 1978; Le Roy Ladurie, 1979). Since the eighteenth-century, and in a spirit of 'progress', carnivals began to be conceived as time wasted, time taken away from productive work. Religious authorities and the bourgeoisie tried to ameliorate the manners of the lower class by "eliminating all traces of the carnivalesque from popular life" (Graeber, 2007, 32).

Because of their subversive character, carnivals have historically suffered frequent prohibitions (Prat i Carós, 1993, 289), including during the Franco era in Spain. Yet, in some rural towns such as the small and relatively isolated town of Laza (Galicia), where carnival was deeply rooted, they persisted despite prohibitions. Masked characters ("*peliqueiros*") emerged simultaneously from several points in the town so that the police

could not stop them; thanks to their masks, they avoided recognition and reprisals (Muñoz-Sueiro, 2022). In other localities, carnivals were instead celebrated in a tempered version without masks and under the guise of normal "spring" or "winter festivities" (Moreno Tello, 2022).

The rural exodus of people to bigger cities in the 1960s caused a decline of carnivals in Spain. In the 1980s, many carnivals were trivialized as parties and instrumentalized, either by the market that turned them into consumption events or by regional authorities through processes of "heritagization" (Hernàndez, 2008). Some suggest that "the reduction in the number of festivities has been intentional within the framework of the hegemonic values of the capitalist system and its state extensions; values linked to a worldview that is avowedly growthist in material terms" (Hernàndez, 2022). Despite this, many subversive carnival elements endured, especially in small rural towns, such as Laza (Galicia, Spain) and Velilla de la Reina (León, Spain). These small rural carnivals have not been co-opted nor commodified to date as they continue to be organized and financed autonomously by citizens' organizations.

Dominant common senses challenged by self-managed carnivals

Carnivals, such as the two mentioned above, continue to host rituals in which criticism of the system is channeled via a parody and mockery of hierarchies. An informant in Velilla described it as follows:

> …to criticize, to whip up, to transgress, to break the rules during one season and then return to
> the fold all year round; it is a collective psychological treatment. (Slow Projects, 2021, 23)

Every year at the carnival at Laza, public actions and themed floats, devised and created, usually in secret, by the locals themselves, mock those at the top of the power hierarchy, namely, big businesspeople, banks, the police, the army, local and national politicians and bosses, the church and the state (Muñoz-Sueiro, 2022). One year, for example, a float paraded bloodied 'dead' men hanging upside down to denounce the lack of quality public health services in rural Galicia.

Rural carnivals are, by their very nature, linked to excess. They are paradigmatic places of *dépense* (see Table 1) – collective expenditures that, from a strictly economic point of view, are unproductive (Kallis, 2018, 220). In the Laza and Velilla carnivals, for example, food and drink made by locals is widely distributed to locals and visitors free of charge in the square. As one informant comments:

> …we are poor, but we are splendid. We have made here nineteen or twenty dozen '*torrajas*',
> 'flowers' and 'ears' [typical sweets] to give to the people who come (Slow Projects, 2021, 31).

Similarly, in Laza, the carnival crews celebrate dinners with a vast amount of food that can never be finished. People distribute different pork products, cakes, '*bicas*' (a cake), wine and '*aguardientes*' (homemade spirits) in the square. Such unproductive expenditures, somewhat counter-intuitively, are seen in recent degrowth work as essential for degrowth, not in the material sense of wastefulness but as a symbol of a logic of dispensing with surpluses collectively, against the ethos of capital accumulation where surplus is saved and reinvested for growth (Romano, 2020; Kallis, 2018, 220; D'Alisa *et al.*, 2014).

Participants in Laza and Velilla carnivals distinguish their festivities from modern forms of individualized leisure. A Laza carnival participant emphasizes that:

> we are all one and that the doors of my house are open to anyone, including those from outside
> the village.

In these small villages, there are few restaurants, hotels or commercial establishments, and the carnivals operate on a logic of frugal abundance (Table 1) where everyone brings and shares the little that they have. The villagers

do not seek to make a profit from the event but willingly incur expenses by offering everyone food and drink without expecting anything in return. As one participant explains:

> we don't buy anything; the food and the costumes are made by the people and the floats are also created by us.

Participants do not regard the carnival as 'leisure' or just relaxation in an otherwise hard year; instead, as they told us, they see in it 'a way of life', the carnival forms their identity (Slow Projects 2021). As others explain:

> it is difficult to describe the emotions to people [from outside] we work all year for a few days, but it's a work that brings us together. (2021, 51-52)

The experience of such traditional carnivals disrupts, we argue, growth-ist common senses of leisure as either time for recuperation to keep working, or as time for consumption: the reward of having worked. Instead, the carnival offers a convivial space where individuals voluntarily work towards re-establishing a sense of community and finding meaning together. Several of degrowth's principles (Table 1) are enacted in festivities like that: commons, relational goods, conviviality or *depénse*.

The reading of the carnival as a "Dionysian resistance that vindicates the right to joy as an existential priority of humanity" (Hernàndez, 2022) is confirmed by our interlocutors. One described:

> …a level of joy... [that is enormous]; you feel super happy (Slow Projects, 2021, 71)
>
> …it is a happy atmosphere, you feel welcomed, and you feel happy and content (2021, 71), that is carnival, to do (…) that which attracts attention, which provokes hilarity, laughter... (2021, 16), the essence of carnival is to give free rein, to be able to do things that during the rest of the year you wouldn't even think of doing (2021, 16).

These feelings resonate with what Lynne Segal calls "radical happiness" (Segal, 2017), articulating a different degrowth conception of wellbeing based on conviviality, sharing, and *dépense*.

Potential and limitations of the different strata of self-managed carnivals

As with the other two traditions we examined here, however, it is important not to treat carnivals as a homogeneous whole. Anthropologist David Gilmore has pointed out the ambivalence of carnival, asserting that, although temporarily subverting the social order, the carnival of Cádiz (Andalusia, Spain) that he studied also reinforced and reproduced sexual, gender and status hierarchies by separating masculine and feminine spaces, promoting the visibility of men and the concealment of women, representing stereotypes of weak women at the mercy of their husbands or making fun of women in the rude band songs called '*chirigotas*' (Gilmore, 1998).

Traditional practices continue also to be in danger of commodification. For councils and *hacenderas*, the risks of being packaged for mass tourist consumption are low because they are not visually spectacular and do not offer an exciting experience. Rural carnivals, on the other hand, are increasingly an object of interest by the media and the tourist industry. This can transform them into consumer spectacles with local actors at the service of foreign audiences, as has happened to some carnivals. Our case studies have avoided this fate so far. They are set far from tourist areas, have high participation that does not produce a division between spectators and actors, and they are managed by emotionally-invested and locally-rooted neighborhood associations. But they do face some of the dangers faced by other non-capitalist practices "always under the threat of being 'translated', i.e., circumscribed, co-opted, appropriated, subsumed" (Monticelli, 2021, p. 108).

6. Conclusion: Towards a politics of postfiguration

Drawing on a Gramscian-inspired anthropology, we have approached traditional practices as cultural manifestations containing elements of an alternative worldview. This worldview, although not necessarily coherent or systematized, may contain progressive elements that allude to an emancipatory future; one where democracy is direct, work is shared, and joy is radical and collective. The bearers of these traditions devote a significant portion of their time to such practices, contrary to the dominant paradigms of electoral democracy, salaried work or commercialized leisure. Degrowth is, at times, regarded as a political project that will emerge in conditions of crisis, through cultural change and via a political movement that takes power and implements policies in a sort of degrowth direction. The operative word here is 'will.' What has been presented in this article is evidence instead of a real, extant spirit of degrowth (Kallis *et al*., 2022) that has existed and continues to exist, embodied in practices voluntarily performed by people, without a political affiliation or activist consciousness.

If prefiguration consists in bringing to the present elements of a desirable future, we can name *post*figuration as the theoretical and political project of bringing inspiring elements from the past to the present imagination of desirable futures. Postfiguration recognizes the essential role of tradition for the present and future; worthy of being preserved, recovered and re-interpreted for the benefit of radical socioecological transition. In this article we gave examples of how one may analyze the progressive strata and the postfigurative potential of traditional practices.

If we follow Gramsci's notion of hegemony as the rearticulation (and practice) of common senses within general society at large, and not just within small circles of radicals, then postfigurative practices may be an even more fertile ground for transformative change than prefigurative ones. There is always the risk, of course, of regressive elements or a conservative postfigurative interpretation of traditions. But being carriers of degrowth common senses as well, such traditions can also be fertile ground for an indirect politicization and unconscious political actions that transcend growth-based capitalism. The open question here concerns the politics of such postfiguration.

Meissner (2021) invited advocates for degrowth to connect to mass trends in popular culture (such as 'minimalism') that may have elements that speak to degrowth. This left unexplored, though, the question of what such engagement might look like, who would do it, and how would one be able to separate desirable from undesirable elements of minimalism. It is one thing to say that the few degrowth academics out there in their popular talks should allude to the claims of minimalists, and an altogether much more challenging endeavour to imagine those concerned with minimalism or decluttering becoming part of a politicized movement struggling for, say, decolonial climate justice.

Our proposition here is that the question of politics cannot be answered in the abstract, but rather by learning from specific groups, such as in our case Stop Expolio de los Bienes Comunales or La Bardal, who selectively reclaim and reinvent traditions as part of a political strategy. We need to study how they do it, what works and what does not, and whether and how these movements manage to link back and enrich the broader movements they are part of with a language sensitive towards tradition. How and under what circumstances may such political channeling work or not, how compatible is this with the identities of everyday participants in these practices, and what tensions might arise as more regressive elements of tradition are also defended? We did not approach our initial research with these questions, but we realize now their importance if we want to develop an understanding of postfigurative politics and strategies.

The hypothesis we have explored is that seemingly radical proposals can make sense to many more people than the usual suspects (activists and those deeply engaged in socio-ecological struggles), if connected with long standing traditional practices that make everyday sense to many more people. This accords with Meissner's 'cultural popularization strategy' (2021). Whereas the European far-right has been mobilizing rural tradition successfully, ecosocialists and political ecologists, for fear of allying with parochial and regressive elements of tradition, have remained much more focused upon forward-looking experimentation. Our contribution here was, as a minimum, an invitation to think and strategize, or rather learn from those who strategize, about how to mobilize traditions for forward-looking transitions.

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