Capitalism and the Binary of Life

Today, there are many indicators which show that Earth is in a period of crisis, but this is no ordinary economic or political crisis. The planet is today going through a crisis that is ultimately ecological and climate based, and it has not come to this situation overnight. It is a crisis which has long been in the making, as we shall discuss, and it is imperative that a better grasp of this crisis is ingrained in our minds. There are two paths to how we understand and respond to this crisis we are faced with. The first is in the way in which we define this era of crisis making, and the second is the way in which we conceptualize the main drivers of this era, which this study shall argue to be capitalism and the Society versus Nature binary. This paper will aim to understand how, in this era, a “global reality” has been forged around this binary and capitalism, how this has impacted the world, and how this might continue on into the foreseeable future.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

It is important for us to have a grasp over the manner in which we define this period where a new global reality has been made, because the formation of our perspectives rest even on the tiny detail of a name – which yields to us the most basic information and connotations we are looking for. So central is this point to the climate change debate that Moore writes that “Conceptualizations of a problem and efforts to resolve that problem are always tightly connected. So, too, are the ways we think about the origins of a problem and how we think through possible solutions” (2015, 145). Thus, understanding what we mean when we use a specific way to refer to this era of global transformations not only gives us a starting point to

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discuss, but also to understand the way we frame the underlying reality. Going deeper, understanding what lies beneath the name allows us to trace the dynamics that has been driving this process – this longue durée – in which this crisis has been in the making.

Current mainstream understanding of the climate crisis has been concentrating on the term Anthropocene, derived from “Anthropos” which is Greek for human. And without presenting much surprise, this way of framing the era of the making of the new global reality – which has led to the climate crisis – has Mankind, or Humanity, as its central actor. It was formulated in order to describe the “‘human dominance of biological, chemical, and geological processes of Earth’… in 2000 in an article…” (Vergès 2017). As such, it inherently implied a condition of things, where humans reigned supreme in the ecological network of the Earth and everything else evolved and took shape in the relations it had with humans. Once set in motion, the Anthropocene outlook made sure that humans had become the driving force of ecological history, as a force which overwhelmed those of nature (Moore 2017, 179). In fact, the entire discourse around the Anthropocene has also been self-reinforcing, in that once it has put Humanity at the center of its outlook, there has been no need to reaffirm this position as evaluation of climate evidence is biased so as to point to Humanity at all times.

Such classification seems justified enough, based on the grounds that it “seems appropriate to assign the term ‘Anthropocene’ to the present, in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch” (Crutzen 2002, 23). Surely enough as Lewis and Maslin writes “Human activity is now global and is the dominant cause of most contemporary environmental change” (2015, 171). Furthermore, the human impact is reaching out to affect not local environmental conditions but many of the global cycles that sustain ecological conditions across Earth (Lewis

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and Maslin 2015, 172). Taken at face value, none of these assertions are and ways of appreciating the Anthropocene outlook are wrong. Humanity has been a major ecological force, and it has transformed geographies and climates since there has been the needs and the means to do so, through forestry, mining, agriculture, and construction to name a few simple ways. In this sense, our current epoch surely is the Anthropocene and perhaps the greatest thing done my man, by bringing about an entire ecological epoch based around him.

However, simply pointing towards human nature and finding answers to the making of this era in the maxim “Humans will be humans” is hardly satisfactory (Patel and Moore 2017, 23; Klein 2018, 4, 6). This is because of certain problems inherent in the framing of the Anthropocene. To begin with, Anthropocene “does not challenge the naturalized inequalities, alienation, and violence inscribed in modernity’s strategic relations of power and production” (Moore 2015, 145; Vergès 2017). In placing Humanity at the top – or core – of its perceptive outlook, the Anthropocene removes from view and considerations all social processes that are a part of what makes Humanity. All causes of ecological transformation and crisis become simply innate and inherent characteristics of Humanity, which has and will always be the way it is today. As such, the situation we find ourselves in today gets framed as an inevitability, which is bound to arise as long as Humanity exists and influences its environment. The question of “how” however, has no place in this matrix, because what matters is that Humanity does what Humanity must – end of discussion.

In conjunction with this point, calling out to Humanity as the foci of the transformation that has been going on in this era raises the scepter of a “faceless enemy”. It is the contention of Moore that “Anthropogenic implicates an actor that doesn’t exist. There is no Anthropos, no

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humanity as a unified actor” (2017, 179). Verily, one cannot look at the wholesale destruction of ecologies and say that Humanity – as an anomalous identity-less mass – has a finger in their destruction, regardless of the underlying connections and appropriations going on. Such an approach is, without a doubt, beneficial to the rhetoric of environmentalism and green politics because it implicates everyone with the crisis and the responsibility to rectify it. However, when it comes down to how the crisis is being defined and understood, this lack of a “concrete and concise culprit” allows for much to escape from view. It masks the appropriation and exploitation of peoples and resources, the creation of the Frontier, and in essence the dynamics of capitalism and the Society versus Nature binary, which will be discussed in detail later on. But suffice it to say, that when we invoke the Anthropocene we are invoking a false identity of blame and responsibility which clouds and obstructs our way of understanding the source, makeup, and responses to the climate crisis.

Looking closely into the way the Anthropocene skews how we see the causes of and responses to the crisis is another aspect of this problem. Vergès writes that “Two views about climate change and the environment have been dominating the media and politics shaping to public debate: apocalyptic (humans are responsible for ecological destruction) and optimistic (scientists and engineers will find solutions)” (2017). Both of these perceptions have mankind at its center. The former takes it that Humanity – as discussed above – is responsible for the destruction of the environment and its repair which, as being “apocalyptic” implies, cannot be done. The latter holds that Humanity is not only the cause but the keyholder to its solution by its ingenuity and prowess. But both ignores the “how” of the crisis: Humanity exists ergo climate crisis exists, and it may or may not be addressed. “Addressed” not at its roots but at its symptoms, the aim is to point out or address the negative consequences, to clean the air or the
water – but not to stop these consequences, the pollution, in the first place. Hence, using the language and outlook of the Anthropocene one can only identify an ongoing crisis, but fail miserably to grasp how it has come to be.

Moreover, the Anthropocene itself is not an internally consistent concept that allows the formulation of clear arguments and operationalization. Lewis and Maslin note that “Several approaches have been put forward to define when the Anthropocene began, including those focusing on the impact of fire, pre-industrial farming, sociometabolism, and industrial technologies…” (2015, 173). Each of these events in history pinpoint not only entirely different beginnings of the era in which the climate crisis has been made, but they also generate different narratives and a different mass of Humanity that corresponds to it (Lewis and Maslin 2015, 177-178). To choose the lighting of the first fire is to implicate a vast sum of Humanity and its development as responsible implicating the very nature of Humanity as inherently destructive. To choose the rise of a modern development, for example consumerism, is to implicate a much smaller section of Humanity and a very specific mode of consumption and social interaction as responsible. As such, the Anthropocene is not only a discursive item that is misleading, but it is also quite problematic to actually utilize as a concept because it is inherently constructed to be vague and fluctuating.

Then what is the way we in which we must label, examine, and understand this epoch where a new reality and the climate crisis was forged? If the key driver of this era is not Anthropogenic, then what? It is in Moore’s work that we find an answer: “Capitalogenic” (2017, 179). The main actor that is Humanity gets replaced by a more observable and identifiable actor: Capitalism. When we take capitalism as central to our understanding of the foundations of the global ecological crisis of today, we “begin to ask how the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of
power and the co-production of nature from an organic and evolving whole” (Moore 2017, 179). Moreover, we shift the focus of our attention away from the consequences – contrary to the Anthropogenic view – and begin to direct our attention to the conditions and causes in which these consequences have come to be (Moore 2015, 148). By putting capitalism in the spotlight, we are able to pinpoint and study what has been, since 1450, perhaps the single most pervasive and definitive actor in the development of Humanity and its relations within itself and with its environment.

We have discussed that the Capitalocene only allows for an actor and its functional mechanisms to be identified, and for a new discourse to be built around how the rise of capitalism as the global mode of production impacted Earth and Humanity. But the Capitalocene outlook does not just introduce analytical clarity and purpose, it also introduces a key dynamic around which every other action and relation under capitalism can be understood. This key dynamic is what has been termed a “value relation, quite literally determining what counts as valuable and what does not” (Moore 2015, 149). This dynamic allows for us to search for an underlying reason in every capitalistic relation we come to observe, during this era of climate crisis making. In this sense, there is no “Humans will be humans” explanation for the unfolding of history, but an explanation which grounds itself in the understanding that “Capitalist value relations make history”. And the making of the climate crisis is saved from a fatalistic approach which dictates that the same outcomes will stand regardless, because Humanity exist and will inherently push things in a certain destructive way. Furthermore, this value in capitalism-oriented approach resonates better with political realities of the world where states react to environmental crises “only when their economic interests are shown to be directly threatened” (Grove 1992, 47).
It is also important here, before moving on to understanding the underlying Society versus Nature binary and capitalism in more detail, to discuss why it is important for us to link our discussion to a capitalogenic point of view. To use a more biological language, “development of an organism is not an unfolding of an internal autonomous program, but the consequence of an interaction between the organism’s internal patterns of response and its external milieu” (Levins and Lewontin 1997, 95). Bridging this to our use of the capitalogenic definition comes from a piece of knowledge that has been introduced before in this paper. Capitalism has been, since the mid-15th century, the most far reaching and influential actor of human development and climate relations. Humanity is the “organism” which has come to exist in the “external milieu” that is Capitalism, as well as the immediate natural environment. The development of Humanity and its impact on the environment has happened within the context of Capitalism, driven by its value relations. As Humanity has been reshaped by Capitalism, Humanity has in turn left its mark on the climate and environment, while in search for more value that can be extracted, actively changing the both the climate and the immediate environment (Levins and Lewontin 1997, 98).

DYNAMICS OF BINARIES AND CAPITALISM

As mentioned before, one of the main organizing principles of this era at the center of this study is the binary of Society and Nature, which is perhaps one of the simplest yet key concepts in our understanding of the origins of today’s climate crisis. This binary is not, however, something that is inherent in the world – it is rather a way of “organizing – and cheapening – life” (Patel and Moore 2017, 44). This binary distinguishes not between people and animals, but between people and people, pushing some into the uncivilized and wild Nature, and barring “dominated groups of people” from being considered as part of Society (von Werlhof
This binary, inherent of the Capitalogenetic orientation of our understanding of this era, existed in varying formulations across time with “evolving, diverse configurations” between the boundaries of Nature and Society (Patel and Moore 2017, 17; von Werlhof 1988, 4). Throughout the Capitalocene entire populations were swept into Nature, becoming differentiated from those held to be part of Society, allowing for them to be treated in radically different fashions.

As the development of the Capitalocene took place, and reached its familiar formation today it always understood who were the “haves”, and who and what were the “have nots”. People located themselves within the confines of the social structures created by this binary, and their positions determined in advance how one would view and treat the other. In this structure, only the work of those in Society would be counted as actual work with any real worth or value, while Nature had become simply “inputs” of production cheapened as far as possible, so that primitive accumulation could take place (Patel and Moore 2017, 21; von Werlhof 1988, 2; Moore 2017, 191). Thus, members of the Society at any given point of time would be aware of their superior social standings vis-à-vis any member of Nature, who were reduced to simple means and tools of production – open to control, abuse, and depletion.

Capitalism in this era was itself existent in a binary structure of flowing and ever-growing frontier accumulation. Hage writes that capitalism has a binary of existence where one side is civilized, logical, and the other side is savage, at war and there is oscillation between the two modes as capitalism shifts between crisis and stability, between frontier making and closing (2017, 59-60). The former “civilized” capitalism has become the domain of Society, whist Nature has been forced to exist and perish in the world of “savage” capitalism. Meaning that the members of Society would be bound by rules and laws in their relations and capitalism played
out beyond the primitive accumulation nexus. On the other hand, the members of Nature would be subjected to the unbridled savagery of the primitive accumulation of capitalism, themselves dehumanized but commodified into cheap resources in this process. As Society dominated Nature and used it as a set of cheap resources to produce for its own ends, capitalism went through a stage of delimiting Nature vs Society, cheapening the former, thriving upon its appropriation, and then legitimizing – but not entirely Socializing – what has been taken by the time the frontier closes (Hage 2017, 62-63; Webb 1954, 18-19). In this manner, people and products who had once been open to the boundless forces of capitalist production were first introduced to the matrix of exploitation, and then their products were used to the benefit of Society. Nature became the powerhouse which sustained not only itself, but also the lives of those that were part of Society. Gradually, as historical shift came along and Nature ceased to be as cheap as it used to be, parts of it were reinvented as Society and integrated into its mode of capitalist accumulation, but never in so complete a fashion so as not to lose its dominance over it fully (Ponting 1991, 213-214).

As capitalism grew and flourished across the globe, it did so through these frontiers mentioned above. Capitalism did not simply use or create these frontiers, it existed and improved upon itself through the frontiers, because it could clearly demarcate Nature from Society and use its tools of exploitation, appropriation, violence, and knowledge (Patel and Moore 2017, 16). These frontiers included all land outside of Europe, especially beginning with those discovered by Columbus, and were the main sources of wealth after 1942 (Patel and Moore 2017, 11; Webb 1954, 17). The frontier provided wealth, at quantities unknown before in Europe, which was appropriated and exploited by successive European empires of the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and ultimately the British (Brooke 2014, 416). It held windfalls of labor, land,
and capital – in the form of gold and silver – which could be obtained cheaply since the frontier was a part of nature (Webb 1954, 20-21; Patel and Moore 2017, 16). As long as the frontier was open, capitalism would go on to thrive by appropriating the products of Nature’s labor and existence.

*Figure 1:* By 1900, the Western empires covered much of the World, any territory inside Europe and the US was the domain of Society, and outside each Society had its respective Nature. ("The World in 1900." Digital image. Reddit. June 20, 2018. Accessed November 1, 2018. https://www.reddit.com)

Where one frontier was closed, it was followed closely by the opening of another all through the Capitalocene. After the turn of the 16th century, European expansion triggered a process whereby different parts of the world, which had so far been largely isolated, became integrated into a single “world economy” (Ponting 1991, 194; Wallerstein 1974, 15) As such, the frontier never ceased to be a part of the capitalogenic patterns of accumulation as we have pointed out, it simply pushed to new spaces and carried the dynamics of capitalism with it. Nature grew and contracted – more so the former than the latter – while destroying the socio-
economic structures that prevailed wherever it went, with the forces of capitalism and Society establishing their patterns of domination and exploitation. Once the frontier became exhausted and Nature became harder to exploit cheaply, spaces that were once the domain of Nature and its mode of accumulation were “reinvented” in Society, and served as nodes in the web of capitalism that was constructed across the globe (Patel and Moore 2017, 15; Solow 1987, 720). In all this, capitalism became a sustained power over the environments it penetrated, and turned into a permanent fixture in the reality that forged the climate crisis of today. Once an environment had been transformed and destroyed, becoming a piece of the climate crisis puzzle, capitalism ensured that it stayed that way.

**THE ORIGINS OF CAPITALISM AND BINARIES**

So far, we have discussed the more theoretical aspects of capitalism and the Nature versus Society binary, in an “ecological crisis making” era, undefined in terms of time and devoid of developmental context. Here, we will strive to present the specifics of the development and deployment of these dynamics through time, and space since we have already seen that capitalism is a “social” system whose existence spans a considerable portion of modern human history (Wallerstein, 1983, 13). At its earliest the capitalist frontier accumulation was kicked off by the Portuguese on the island of Madeira, discovered in 1425, where by 1450 they had destroyed the local ecosystem by agriculture and animal husbandry, and introduced sugar plantations (Solow 1987, 718; Ponting 1991, 195; Moore 2017, 195). Sugar was the pushed for and determined the mode of operation of new frontiers, as the crop itself exhausted resources which were a part of Nature and needed new parts of Nature to be brought into the production process (Wallerstein 1974, 44; Solow, 1987, 713).
As sugar pushed for the creation of new frontiers across the globe, it created a new network of capital relations, which shifted the centers of commerce from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic (Solow 1987, 711-712; Wallerstein 1974, 15, 43; Brooke 2014, 407). The first frontier, based on sugar, opened on the island of Madeira, followed by the Canaries; carried to Sao Tome in Africa; and introduced to Brazil, from which it was spread out to the West Indies and the suitable regions of North America. All of these “colonial regions” were transformed, with the help of a sugar-infused rush for capital accumulation, into “centers of international trade, [united] with Europe… in a complex web of transactions” (Solow, 717). However, neither the frontiers nor the cultivation of sugar, as we have discussed before, are eternal in their capacity to yield capital returns. The soil gets exhausted, and the frontier fizzles out – both mean the end of an era of capitalist accumulation and the beginning of a global climate crisis.

For the most part however, it has been easy for Society to open new frontiers, simply by moving to new geographies and new crops. It has opened frontiers into sugar, tobacco, and cotton in Americas; tea, rice, and rubber in Asia; cocoa and coffee in Africa; as well as palm oil, bananas minerals, and timber (Ponting 1991, 206-218; Brooke 2014, 423-424). Of course, these geographical lines have never been set in stone: rubber has been extracted in Brazil, whilst Egyptian cotton was made into a global luxury item. Wherever Society was able to open a new frontier to invest and in turn accumulate massive amounts of capital for as cheap as possible, it has done so – in the process establishing and abandoning a multitude of enterprises and industries in succession. The same process has been set in stone and repeated across all colonial structures: conquest and exploitation for ‘exotic crops’, destruction of local biomes through monocropping and destruction of indigenous agriculture, institution of European ownership and
operative control over production, and domination by European minorities on site (Ponting 1991, 196, 199-200; Worster, 1990, 1096).

As we have alluded before, Society has depended upon frontiers so that it could acquire Nature and surplus capital as cheaply as possible – and for free at best – for its purposes. Here, the focus is on two specific types of “cheaps”, namely Cheap Nature and Money, to borrow from Patel and Moore. Cheap Money, especially made available by sources outside of the actual colonizing powers was essential in driving the frontier-based capital accumulation of the era. The initial production of sugar by the Portuguese in Madeira and the Spanish on the Canaries was financed by the Genoese, who were willing to lend the money for the “conquest” of new frontiers for increased capital returns in the future (Wallerstein 1974, 49; Solow 1987, 721). The colonizers would use their borrowed capital to engage in production, accumulating capital in the process. The lenders would receive payments with interest, enlarging the capital which they would loan again to the same colonial powers, for use at the frontiers.

Of course, the Genoese did not stay as the dominant financiers of the frontier expansion and accumulation. As the centers of accumulation shifted towards the Atlantic, the Dutch and ultimately the British became the grand bankers of frontier accumulation. These nations were able to finance the capitalist expansion at the frontier, because they were able to do so at low interest levels (Patel and Moore 2017, 63). Large amounts of credit have been taken by the members of Society, so that Nature could be put to work at the frontier in order to accumulate more capital, which would in turn provide significant returns to the lenders. As such, Cheap Money came to enrich everyone involved in its use and distribution, because capital was central to the entire production process: it was both the enabler and the ultimate goal.
Cheap Nature by itself, includes the cheapening of all that has been divided off into Nature, where humans and inanimate materials alike have been cheapened in value so that capital accumulation can be brought to peak levels. History shows that the human part of Nature has been cheapened – apart from being removed from consideration as humans – by being commodified as slaves. Slavery had become the mode of labor in production by the time the Portuguese introduced sugar to Madeira, and where the frontier went, cheap human nature in the form of slaves and slave labor followed (Solow 1987, 713; Vergès 2017). Cheapness of Nature however also meant the cheapness of non-human materials found at the frontiers. Because Society was imbued with the “destiny” to subdue non-human Nature and take control of its resources to satisfy its needs and desires, such cheapening was only “natural” (Patel and Moore 2017, 49-50; Vergès 2017). Once non-human Nature had been reinterpreted as something akin to “manna from heaven” which could be exploited and used without restraint, it went through the ultimate cheapening. It gained value inasmuch it was part of the capitalist form of accumulation, which would come to be established at the frontier, where Nature would be at its cheapest: free.

All of this cheapening was not achieved simply by conquest but also by the enlargement of human knowledge regarding the frontier. The tool it employed was modern cartography, which allowed entire frontiers to be made knowable, and thus available to exploitation and utilization in capitalist production (Moore 2017, 182; Patel and Moore 2017, 52).

Whilst capitalism sustained itself through the cheapening of Nature and Money, the Nature versus Society binary survived by employing racism and sexism as further sub-binaries. Racism as a sub-binary allowed for entire populations to be pushed into Nature, as “wild” people who were “ungovernable”. Society creates on the one side a realm which is egalitarian, lawful, and democratic where the good life could be lived in regulated capitalism; and a realm of
violence, dispossession, discrimination, and unchecked accumulation on the other (Hage 2017, 38-39, 55, 60). Thus, came to being a binary existence on Earth, in which the “original” members of Society were able to set themselves apart, even after the members of Nature were elevated into positions within Society. Racism allowed for those elevated into Society from Nature to be set apart by allowing them to be presented as people who lived in conditions of wilderness and savagery, unfitting of Society. Of course, it must be pointed out, that this situation of “savagery” does not exist in a vacuum, free of outside factors. The savage accumulation which defines the racial other is a product of Society, who has and employs the means of such accumulation at the frontier, where the racial other resides. Furthermore, racism allowed for Society to shield itself from the savagery whose existence it affirmed by pointing to the conduct of others regarding the members of Nature and Nature-elevated-to-Society (Hage 2017, 66-67). As long as a group existed in Society, whose relations with the racial outsider was worse than that of another given group, the perpetuation of the conditions of savagery becomes justified. Thus, Society gains a free hand in perpetuating the savage capitalism at the frontier, because it is not as evil as the alternatives are, hence the suggestion that colonization is beneficial to the colonized.

Racism however, as we have pointed out, did not simply allow for people to be divided off into a category of a “racial other” which lived in savagery and could be exploited as such. It also allowed for these racial others to be deemed “ungovernable” because in their exodus from the savagery of their conditions they broke down national borders (Hage 2017, 36-37). Furthermore, because the racial outsider could not be properly assimilated into the social structured which marked the civilized world of Society it was further stigmatized (Hage 2017, 37). As such, the racial outsider came to embody those peoples who were non-adoptable and
threatening to the descendant of the “original” Society – a condition which condemns them to savagery in a vicious circle (Hage 2017, 81). In this sense, the racial divide becomes an inescapable fixture of capital relations, produced and reproduced as a sub-binary. Those who have been sorted into existence under a more savage mode of capitalist exploitation were locked into their place because they were made into racial outsiders to Society, whose existence outside savagery could not be imagined. When the racial other acted to break out of the conditions of savagery it existed in, it was pushed back into its savage mode of existence by Society because they were unable or unwilling to conform to a fundamentally different mode of existence. Of course, we must also note that for the most part, this fundamentally different mode of existence is made hard to conform to or accept by Society, so that the racial other can be pushed back.

Sexism as a sub-binary, on the other hand, worked specifically to push women out of Society, and into Nature as exploitable work and as a means of establishing control over the reproductive processes necessary to maintain capitalist accumulation. Control over women, and their reproductive functions becomes in effect control over the creation and upbringing of one of the most important factors in sustained capitalist accumulation to achieve cheapness (von Werlhof 1988, 4; Federici 2004, 66; Patel and Moore 2017, 110). Once Society was identified with men and Nature with women – and more broadly with femininity – the work that women did was open to total devaluation, the cheapness of which was to become the cheapness of reproducing and caring for workers. It was not only the devaluation of women’s work which contributed to cheapness. By removing women from the equation determining wages for work, the Capitalists of Society were able to cheapen the wages paid to men because the main concern of Capitalists became the reproduction of the man, not his family. As such, women were made into a new class of people of their own, excluded from earning self-sustaining wages and reduced to poverty and economic dependence on men (Federici 2004, 75). This change also coincided with the rise of a mechanistic outlook towards the world, which idealized the control of the male Society over the female Nature, by using the fruits of scientific knowledge in production and exploitation of Nature (Merchant 1981, 15).

Apart from the simple labelling of women as inferior to men and the removal of female control over their own productive capabilities, sexism worked in two explicit ways (von Werlhof 1988, 6). On one hand women were reimagined as submissive and good-natured “creatures” and on the other the home was redefined as their workplace. In the capitalist male ideology, women became “creatures” – not human since they had become a part of Nature – whose role in production and reproduction was to remain passive and controllable (Merchant 1980, 149). To
reduce women to the position of submission to men meant that control over reproduction and production of the workforce, and its cheapness could be brought under extensive male control. Control in this sense is not simply control over the female mind and body, it is control over the capacity to bear children, and keeping the workforce plenty and therefore cheap. However, although the main benefits laid with the submission of women and control over their reproductive capacities, another benefit was also made. Women were also seen to have “positive moral influence” on men (Federici 2004, 103). Thus, the control over the female body also became control over the male mind. The women were to set their men straight, reinforcing the dominant binaries and ensuring that the prerogatives of capitalist accumulation was not challenged, by serving as constant reminder to males that others depended on them for sustenance.

Simultaneously, the workplace of women came to be identified as the home – or rather the household – so that their work was directly devoted to reproduction and care of the workforce (Patel and Moore 2017, 111; Federici 2004, 94). The monetary upkeep of such work was removed from the consideration of the Capitalist – in the wages he gave to men – and left to the women to handle within the home. This delimitation of the female workspace to the home – not to a workshop, factory, or office – allowed for female labor to become free, because it was done outside of what Society had come to define as the “proper” workplace. Work that was not done in the public space, within the formal market arrangements could exist as cheap – and in the case of women unpaid – labor, would continue to prop up capitalist accumulation.

Amidst this sex based sub-binary transformation and processes of division and accumulation, women were “expected to be grateful for having found her ‘true nature’; whether ‘whore’ or ‘saint’, tamed or not” (von Werlhof 1988, 6). This is akin to the understanding in the
racism debate, that the savage mode of accumulation is beneficial to those subjugated to it, since the alternative is far worse. Here, the control over women and the subjugation of their reproductive capacities, and their “imprisonment” to the home as the place of their work has been accompanied by the image of feminine fragility in the face of a savage world. Under such conditions, women were expected to be grateful to the Society of men for placing them in their “rightful” place. In effect, the sexism sub-binary was expected to be self-sustaining, because it would come to command both the obedience and the loyalty of the women it affected.

Figure 3: The image of the nuclear family in the 1950s is one of the epitomes of the sexual binary. The man rules over the house and is the source of income. The woman does unpaid care work, and brings up the next generation of the workforce. All is idyllic, everything is as nature has intended. ("Images of the 1950s Nuclear Family." Digital image. Nuclear Family 1950s - By Jordan Steer. January 2, 2013. Accessed November 22, 2018. http://nuclear-family-jsteer.blogspot.com/2013/01/images-of-1950s-nuclear-family.html.)

**OBSERVING THE PAST, LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

Up to this point in this study, our main concern has been to demonstrate the key dynamics, which have been at work since the fifteenth century, creating the climate crisis of today in the Capitalocene era. We have traced Capital, through the frontiers as a mode of production – or rather exploitation and appropriation – which has grown and survived by depending upon Cheap Nature and Money. In the process, Capitalism has coexisted with social binaries, mainly in the form of Nature versus Society, where the latter was valued and the former
devalued in the process of capitalist accumulation. This main binary has further been aided by sub-binaries of racism and sexism, which has introduced deeper and increased cleavages, allowing for Cheap Nature and the frontiers of capitalism to be more precisely demarcated.

The aim of this paper, as such has been to observe the past to understand the historical practices of capitalism. However, it is not impossible to look into the future knowing where we have come and what the “business-as-usual” is for capitalist accumulation. If Capitalism and its binaries continue to exist as they have so far, then we can expect the climate crisis at our hands to continue becoming worse in the following centuries if not decades, in greater magnitudes (Brecher, 2017, 95-96). What the path to solving this crisis is something that is beyond the scope of this paper, but proposed solutions are not unknown. Carbon taxation, recycling, faith in human ingenuity and commitment to international accords, switching over to new sources of energy or alternative modes of production, and a “climate insurgency” have all been proposed and implemented with varying degrees of success (Maslin, 2014, 121-124, 128, 130-133)\(^4\). Perhaps the better solution is to change our understanding and configuration of capitalism itself; or an ecological “revolution” rather than the usual rhetoric of war and crusade (Aaron and Godoy, 2016)\(^5\). Whatever is the solution that is ultimately deployed – whose nature and success is at a level of speculation we will not indulge in – it is going to have to address the fundamentals of the Capitalogenic period.

\(^{4}\) The version of the book used in this paper has different formatting than the book itself, and thus might contain differences in page numbers being cited.

\(^{5}\) This is an article published online and as such has no page numbers which could be properly cited.
References


