



## Discussions and interventions

# Anthropocene, Capitalocene & the Flight from World History: Dialectical Universalism & the Geographies of Class Power in the Capitalist World-Ecology, 1492-2022

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*All historical writing must set out from these natural bases [‘geological, oro-hydrographical, climatic and so on’] and their modification in the course of history through the action of men.*

*The proletariat can... only exist world-historically, just as communism, its activity, can only have a ‘world-historical’ existence.*

*(Marx & Engels 2010: 51, 49, second emphasis added)*

The unfolding planetary crisis – which is also an epochal crisis of the capitalist world-ecology – cries out for “pluriversal” imaginations of every kind. But what kind of pluriversalism, set against what kind of universalism, and for what kind of politics?

These words – pluriversalism, universalism – can be dangerous and disabling when abstracted from capitalism’s world history (Marx & Engels 2010: 49). These and many companion terms – humanism and post-humanism, Eurocentrism, and all manner of -cenes – have been used and abused so promiscuously that both interpretive and political clarity is easily lost. At their core is a flight from world history: from the “*real* movement” of historical capitalism (Marx & Engels 2010: 482). The pretext for this flight typically rests on two major claims. One is an empiricist assertion that world history is diverse and therefore cannot be grasped in its combined and uneven patterns. The second is an ideological claim that any attempt to narrate capitalism’s differentiated unity is irremediably Eurocentric. The result is a descent into amalgamations of regional particularisms with assertions that the problem of modern world history is *Europe* – rather than capitalism. These enable “critical” theorists to redefine the interpretive debate, away from the real ground of world-historical turning points and towards philosophical and conceptual propositions abstracted from those turning points. Too

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often, critical theorists have been content to throw *their* (correct?) phrases against *other* (incorrect?) phrases. Dropped from the frame is the debate over decisive world-historical transitions, the specific patterns of power, profit and life within and across eras of capitalism, and the globalizing geographies of class power.

It is a very old problem. Marx, expelled from Paris and landing in Brussels in the spring of 1845 (soon joined by Engels), met the problem directly. Writing amidst industrial capitalism's simmering revolutionary tensions, Marx and Engels confronted the idealism of the Young Hegelians and the "true socialists." Notwithstanding

*their allegedly 'world-shattering' phrases, [they] are the staunchest conservatives. The most recent of them have found the correct expression for their activity when they declare they are only fighting against 'phrases.' They forget, however, that they themselves are opposing nothing but phrases to these phrases, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world when they are combating solely the phrases of this world (Marx & Engels 2010: 30).*

Among historical materialism's decisive contributions is its interpretive power to demystify the bourgeoisie's "ruling ideas" in service to socialist revolution (Marx & Engels 2010: 59ff). Is that contribution uneven? From a dialectical perspective, of course it is. And that's the point. Historical materialism is a method organized to reveal the "real movements" of class society in the web of life. In other words, historical materialism is, above all, *historical*. And by *historical*, Marx and Engels underline, they mean "the actual empirical existence of men in their *world-historical*, instead of local, being." (Marx & Engels 2010: 49). Capitalism's uniqueness is found in the historical geography of endless accumulation, which

*mak[es] each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others, and finally puts world-historical, empirically universal individuals in place of local ones... [T]his transformation of history into world history is by no means a mere abstract act on the part of 'self-consciousness,' the world spirit, or of any other metaphysical spectre, but a quite material, empirically verifiable act (Marx & Engels 2010: 49, 51).*

In this passage, Marx and Engels foreground capitalism's internationalization of everyday life and, therefore, of class power. This globalization was irreducibly shaped by the "twofold relation" of class society – not only socio-ecological at every turn but premised on an active materialism through which class society is at once (but unevenly) producer and product of webs of life (Marx & Engels 2010: 43; Burkett 1999; Foster 2000). This geohistorical trinity of environment-making, class formation and planetary urbanization has been central to my thinking about capitalism as a world-ecology<sup>1</sup>.

That argument is straightforward: identifying, interpreting, and reconstructing the origins and development of planetary crisis is among the world left's most fundamental *political* tasks<sup>2</sup>. Virtually everything about climate justice politics today turns on one's conception of world history – even and especially when those conceptions are ahistorical or paper-thin. Ahistorical thinking is almost guaranteed to reproduce the bourgeoisie's ruling ideas. The "second wave" environmentalism that emerged after 1968, for example, was hostage to the dominant fetishes of the early nineteenth century: populationism and industrialism (Guha 2000: 69–97). It was and is an outlook strongly predisposed to technocratic and technological fetishes, and to ignoring imperial power and the environmental problems faced by workers and peasants worldwide (see, Robertson 2012; Montrie 2011; Moore 2021a).

So much, yet so little, has changed since 1968. Today's big "E" Environmentalism – the "Environmentalism of the Rich" (Dauvergne 2016) and its Anthropocene Consensus – remains captive to these nineteenth-century fetishes and to the program of planetary managerialism (Moore 2021a). Multiple antagonists of planetary *sustainability* – itself a relentlessly polysemic concept well-integrated into the neoliberal eco-industrial complex – are itemized: economic growth, consumerism, inefficient markets, wasteful technology, urbanization, and yes, fifty years after Ehrlich and 225 years after Malthus, overpopulation (Ehrlich 1968). This laundry list is illustrated by the Popular Anthropocene's now-iconic "hockey stick" charts and Great Acceleration narratives (McNeill & Engelke 2016; see also Moore 2017b).

A fateful collision, we are told, shapes modern world history: "Humans" are "overwhelming the great forces of nature" (Steffen *et al.* 2007). The Popular Anthropocene and political ontologists find common ground in the philosophy of external relations: the "collision" of essences conceived through network and system metaphors rather than the interpenetration of opposites. Gone from such accounts are the constitutive role of popular revolts, social revolutions, and imperialism as the mechanism of class formation and the appropriation of Cheap Natures. The politics that issues from this cosmology of Man versus Nature – invented during the rise of capitalism after 1492 – is some combination of techno-scientific planetary management ("listen to *the* science") combined with pious liberal moralism: "live simply so that others may live." All the while, capitalism's business as usual sustains.

## What is, and what is not, the Capitalocene? From World-historical method to proletarian internationalism

The relations between the origins of a world-historical problem, its historical development, and its recent configurations of power, profit and life are intimate. One's assessment of these relations feeds, more-or-less directly, into one's conception of world politics. Tragically – three decades after Harvey's lament that Green Thought either ignores environmental history or treats it as "a repository of anecdotal evidence in support of particular claims" – environmentalist theory proceeds as if capitalism's history is epiphenomenal (Harvey 1993).

Counter-intuitively, such history denialism lends itself to critical variants of Hillary Clinton's neoliberal insistence that we "get over" the long history of imperialism: "For goodness sakes, this is the 21st century. We've got to get over what happened 50, 100, 200 years ago" (Reuters 2010). A political theory de-linked from capitalism's world histories produces a politics with major blind spots, not least around imperialism's willingness to "destroy the village in order to save it" and the signal contribution of anti-imperialist revolutions in defending those metaphorical (and actual) villages<sup>3</sup>. The Capitalocene thesis is one antidote to this history-denialism. Both the 1830 and 1492 Capitalocene theses – for all their differences – agree: climate justice politics must interrogate the origins of planetary crisis (see, Malm 2016; Moore 2017a; Moore 2018). About which, more presently.

The flight from history performs a twofold ideological task for capital. First, it fragments our understanding of how structures of knowledge, the geocultural pillars of capitalist domination, and the worldwide dynamics of capital and class fit together. With decolonial perspectives, the problem is revealed in a seemingly-infinite

stream of additive conceptual assemblages: “the heteropatriarchal capitalist modern/colonial world system” and all that (Escobar 2018: xii). The simplest version of these additive formulations is some version of *colonialism plus capitalism*. Almost invariably, these disconnect both capitalism and colonialism from specific class structures – and the dynamics of peripheral class formation – implanted by specific imperial projects seeking to secure a good business environment (e.g., Grosfoguel 2002). Importantly, such disconnection tends to present *any* account foregrounding class and capital as “reductionist” – a view that collapses the significant differences between world-historical class analysis and Eurocentric class formalism. Even more curiously, much of the now-fashionable settler colonialism argument reproduces an older Civilizing discourse of “native” and “settler” – which also abstracted from class relations (albeit with different political sympathies), not uncommonly in the interests of sustainable development *avant la lettre* (e.g., Jacks & Whyte 1939).

The rise of capitalism was tightly bound to climate change and successive Civilizing Projects (Moore 2021e). European Universalism – and its pivotal trinity of Man, Nature, and Civilization – matured in the long seventeenth century. This was capitalism’s first *developmental* crisis. These crises mark the transition from one phase of capitalism to another, during which systemwide crises are resolved through new rounds of primitive accumulation and the extra-economic appropriation of Cheap Natures (see Moore 2015). The seventeenth century’s “general crisis” was a perfect storm of climate change, popular revolt, endless war, and economic volatility. The climate downturn – unfavorable even by the standards of the Little Ice Age – was a decisive moment (Parker 2013). It was driven by natural forcing and amplified by conquest, commodification, and class formation in the Americas after 1492. The latter marked the emergence of *capitalogenic* forcing. Its geological signature was the Orbis Spike, Maslin and Lewis’s (2015) term for the sixteenth-century carbon drawdown resulting from New World genocides (see also, Cameron *et al.* 2015).

Similar to the climate-class conjuncture two centuries earlier – marking feudalism’s *epochal* crisis – this seventeenth-century conjuncture amplified class and political tensions, propelling popular revolt and endless war in a Europe fiscally exhausted by the Valois-Hapsburg wars. These culminated in the great financial crisis of 1557 (Patel & Moore 2017). However, in contrast to the late medieval conjuncture, the crisis was resolved. The new modern state-machineries at the heart of Iberian, then Dutch and English, seaborne empires succeeded in “fixing” the seventeenth-century crisis of world order and world accumulation. That fix was realized through an audacious series of productivist campaigns. This was the world-ecological revolution of the long seventeenth century, bringing a critical increment of planetary life into the circuit of Cheap Nature for the first time. Its crown jewels were Peru’s silver mining complex and northeastern Brazil’s sugar plantations. Meanwhile, within Europe, an epochal movement of semi-proletarianization generated explosive class contradictions in the countryside, manifested in waves of agrarian rebellion (see, Moore 2010a, 2010b; Linebaugh & Rediker 2000).

European Universalism crystallized in this first capitalogenic climate crisis – a developmental crisis grasped as a turning point in capitalism’s trinity of power, profit, and life. Refusing conquest-determinism and climate-determinism, this world-historical reckoning understands these two moments as dialectical antagonisms driving capitalism towards a “climate fix” strategy prioritizing large-scale industry and trans-Atlantic proletarianization. In the colonies, the problem for empire was to restore and expand Cheap Labor following the slaving-induced genocides. Within central and western

Europe, the problem was to contain the dangerous classes – which in the fourteenth century had dealt a historical defeat to Europe’s ruling classes and by the seventeenth century threatened, once again, to get out of hand (Zagorin 1982). In this first capitalist climate crisis, forms of Universalism began to materialize that directly facilitated this climate fix. Hence, the remarkable synchronicity of the seventeenth-century’s labor/landscape revolution with its enabling real abstractions: Man, Nature, and Civilization, quickly germinating naturalized ideologies of racial and gendered domination.

European Universalism was a class-managerial imperative whose geocultural architecture rested on Nature. Note the uppercase, *Nature*. It was a ruling idea and governing accumulation strategy that relocated the vast majority of humans along with extra-human life into that new cosmological (yet very material) zone, *Nature*. The managerial priority was to “civilize” such humans, of course always in the interests of securing the maximal exploitation of labor-power and the maximal appropriation of unpaid work. This is the origins of planetary management as a guiding thread for imperial practice and the appropriation of Cheap Natures – especially the Four Cheaps of food, labor, energy and raw materials (Moore 2021d). European Universalism’s vision of planetary management, defined by the anti-political rationalization of socio-ecological problems on the road to Progress, is with us still. Call it Sustainable Development, the Anthropocene, whatever – old wine, new bottles.

This is where Cartesian rationality – and its mind/body dualism – moves to the fore. The significance of Descartes’ contribution is easily displaced into a purely philosophical discussion. My priority lies elsewhere: in how Cartesian rationality expressed and enabled early capitalism’s managerial fantasies, over time congealing into a managerial ethos that would inform successive waves of imperial, resource, and workplace control revolutions. Centuries before Frederick Winslow Taylor formalized “scientific management,” pursuing the managerial concentration of “brain work” and the reduction of proletarian labor “almost to the level of labor in its animal form,” Descartes articulated a philosophy of *planetary* management (quotations respectively from Taylor 1912: 98; Braverman 1974: 78). Distinguishing between *thinking things* and *extended things* as discrete essences, and prioritizing the domination of the latter by the former, Descartes articulated the geocultural “premises of the work-discipline” that capitalism required (Federici 2004; Descartes 2006). In so doing, a Cheap Labor strategy was installed at the heart of European Universalism – and its Promethean impulse.

By the time of Descartes’ classic formulation of an early modern managerial philosophy (1637) – separating the thinkers (managers) from the bodies (workers) – modern structures of knowledge were taking shape. Across the seventeenth century, the concatenation of Descartes, Newton, Bacon and Locke codified the capitalist “system of knowledge” (Wallerstein 1980; Wallerstein 2006). The structures of knowledge were, in successive turns, dependent and independent variables, channeling but also informing the knowledge and practice of imperialism and its trinity of conquest, class formation, and commodification. The structures of knowledge and domination crystallized *together* in this era for a sound reason: their dialectical unity was crucial to imperial class projects – cultural, political, and economic – aimed at securing the conditions of expanded accumulation.

This leads us to the question of the Capitalocene. First, let’s be clear that the Capitalocene is not an argument for the primacy of economic motives. Nor is it an attempt to substitute an abstract logic for world history – as with decolonial thought. For all the significant differences between 1492 and 1830 theses, both prioritize the rise of capitalism. For Malm, it’s an Anglo-centric story shaped by the geographies

of class struggle, technical innovation and the coal revolution (Malm 2016). For me, it's a world-historical story of the epoch-making land/labor revolution after 1492, producing a capitalist world-ecology (Moore 2017a). Neither seeks to substitute human for geological history. Both are staunch critics of economism, insisting on the centrality of political power in establishing and reproducing the necessary conditions of endless accumulation.

The Capitalocene argument is a *method* – not an abstract formula (Moore 2017c). Methodological arguments about the bounding of time, space, and socio-ecological relations must be interrogated based on what they allow one to explain. Malm's circuit of fossil capital and my theory of Cheap Nature are methodological procedures tracing the emergence of capitalist socio-ecological relations. There are differences. Malm thinks I am a Latourian. I think Malm's theory of fossil capital internalizes a resource fetish and practices a Eurocentric class formalism. These are differences among comrades, although one can't help but see a missed opportunity in Malm's reluctance to engage the historical questions (see, Moore 2017a).

Whereas most critical theory – and most eco-socialism – dissolves that world history in the acid bath of “world-shattering” phrases, the world-ecology conversation insists that radical theory is world-historical, or it is nothing. The Capitalocene thesis is an argument about *turning points* and *patterns*. It challenges the imperialist mythology of Man and Nature inscribed in that most sacred phrase, *anthropogenic* climate change. Its alternative is *capitalogenic* climate change: shorthand for the emergence of capitalism as a planetary force. This method flows from a commitment to identifying and informing the class politics that pinpoint capitalism's strategic vulnerabilities. If we wish to understand those weak links, we must situate them historically and geographically within the *longue durée* of capitalist environment-making – not least, within previous political conjunctures of unfavorable climate change.

The Capitalocene method highlights the three most pressing historical-geographical questions of capitalogenic planetary change<sup>4</sup>. First, it situates the origins of the planetary crisis within early capitalism's labor/landscape revolution. Second, it identifies and interprets the patterns of recurrence, evolution, and crisis in capitalism's world history. Third, one can argue for the novel character of the present moment only after identifying capitalism's cumulative trends and cyclical patterns.

This method has two virtues. One, it directly confronts the neo-Malthusian orthodoxy of Man and Nature – broadly conceived, an ahistorical and externalist conception of the “limits to growth.” Second, it constructs a world history of the limits to capital forged through modernity's contradictory unities of class struggle, capital accumulation, geocultural domination, and imperial power. These world-historical unities are at once producers and products of the web of life. Far from denying the limits to capital, world-ecology affirms these as the antagonistic unity of “inside” and “outside” relations, themselves interpenetrating and interchangeable (Ollman 1971; Levins & Lewontin 1985). This conversation foregrounds capitalism's drive to extend its hegemony over new domains of life, necessary to restructure its limits and postpone the day of reckoning. In that pursuit, capitalist environment-making transforms not only the conditions for the reproduction of planetary life but the valorization process (Marx 1976: 283).

The valorization process – comprising the transformation of value and its wider socio-ecological implications – not only encounters limits, but actively *produces* these. Here the concept of negative-value may prove useful, drawing out the *political* implications of modernity's antagonisms of life and capital. In this perspective,



capitalist environment-making *necessarily* generates contradictory relations that cannot be solved by capital (Moore 2015). Any climate “fix” – authoritarian or socialist – will undermine capitalism’s five-century business-as-usual model. To repeat what every primer on dialectics tells us: this is a quantity-qualitative transformation of the highest order (Marx & Engels 1987: 356). Capital *must* exhaust the biospheric conditions of capital accumulation, which is far more than the depletion of passive webs of life. Such exhaustion also emerges through webs of life in revolt against toxification and all manner of bourgeois simplifications. Just as the proletariat resists capital’s dehumanizing logic, the biotariat – those webs of life set to work for capital – continually unsettles the disciplines of planetary management (Collis 2016; Wallis 2000).

Capital tends to see proletariat and biotariat as just so many interchangeable factors of production. Thus, Marx’s observation that labor-power becomes, for capital, “disposable human material” alongside the other “material elements” consumed in production (Marx 1976: 785–786). Successive waves of capitalist development have pushed this linear development to its qualitative rupture. Forms of social life – entangling the human and extra-human – emerge that are increasingly incompatible with the logic of capital. This counter-tendency is *negative-value*. It’s not negative in a mathematical sense. Rather, these are limiting tendencies. Once activated, they threaten the *negation* (the transcendence) of the law of value. So long as sufficiently large frontiers of Cheap Nature could be conquered and appropriated, the activation of negative-value was kept within manageable limits. As those frontiers have been enclosed – including the enclosure of the atmospheric commons as a dumping ground for greenhouse gases – capitalism’s contradictions have become increasingly unmanageable. Although the specific expressions have changed, the insights of Lenin and Luxemburg on the closure of frontiers and the intensification of inter-imperialist rivalry retains considerable power (Luxemburg 1970; Lenin 1964). World-ecology extends those insights to capitalism’s internalizing relation with and within webs of life. This approach has the advantage of identifying capitalism’s weak links (its limits) and clarifying the possibilities for planetary justice and Biotarian socialism.

European’s Universalism logic *is* totalizing (Mignolo 1995). Forgotten in so many critical accounts is an elementary historical observation: Universalism is the geocultural moment of the endless accumulation of capital. It is neither base nor superstructure. It is sometimes a “force of production” in its own right, at other points an indispensable mechanism for legitimating a wildly unequal and violently reproduced capitalist world-ecology (Wallerstein 2006). This is a bourgeois Universalism.

The alternative is not a world history narrated through “a network of local histories and multiple local hegemonies” (Mignolo 2012: 22). This is abstract particularism. It is the mirror image of abstract Universalism. The anti-capitalist way forward is a dialectical universalism. Dialectics proceeds through variation, not in spite of it. Its socio-ecological basis is the worldwide formation of the capitalogenic trinity forged in the seventeenth-century crisis: the epoch-making relations of the climate class divide, climate apartheid and climate patriarchy (Moore 2019). This ideological-class-imperial configuration was understood, even if provisionally, from the first stirrings of proletarian internationalism: emerging in the seventeenth century’s trans-Atlantic class struggles. In the hands, bodies and minds of the plantation proletariat, dialectical universalism recognized that the diverse forms of appearance of oppression and exploitation belied an underlying unity (Linebaugh & Rediker 2000; James 1989). The question of internationalism – and of a dialectical universalism that pursues human liberation in its widest diversity – would thenceforth be fundamental to working-class politics. The twentieth century’s inflection

point was Lenin's reorientation towards national liberation struggles from Baku (1920) onwards (Prashad 2008). Spectacularly, such internationalism – uneven, often fraught, always fragile – was the crux of the worldwide class struggle, with national liberation as its pivot, across the postwar era (Arrighi, Hopkins & Wallerstein 1989). Why should this be? As every new reader of the *Manifesto* learns, it's because capital must drive beyond all limits and, in so doing, creates an internationalist system oriented to the destruction of effective resistance, yet creating the socio-ecological basis for revolutionary action.

The Capitalocene is an evolving conversation to clarify the historical geography of capitalism's long march towards planetary crisis and world revolution. It eschews a double alienation characteristic of critical and mainstream approaches. First, it rejects historical interpretations that take modern fetishes as their point of departure. For the Popular Anthropocene and most environmentalism, this is one or another version of the Man and Nature cosmology. For pluriversal approaches, and its wider decolonial conversation, this is “the West and the Rest,” pitting a reified Europe against the rest of the world. The former unfolds through an abstracted logic of empirical observation embedded in the deep history of positivist and imperial thought. The latter embraces, as we shall see, the most thoroughgoing Eurocentrism under the sign of anti-Eurocentric critique. Offering no account for the epochal synthesis of power, profit and life realized in the long sixteenth century, we are treated to a reified modernity isolated from its patterns of accumulation, class formation, and geopolitical power.

This decolonial approach has the curious (and surely unintended) consequence of rendering the rise of Europe as quite miraculous! Rather than reconstructing the historical geography of the transition to capitalism across these early modern centuries, we are treated to a woke version of the European miracle, through which the political ecology of class, empire, and capital is nowhere to be found. This leaves only a reified modernity to explain an unprecedented biogeographical transition in human affairs (the so-called Columbian Exchange) and an unprecedented labor/landscape revolution in the centuries after 1492.

Delivering on the promises of climate justice will require a new, unprecedented labor/landscape revolution in the coming century. That revolutionary strategy – towards a Proletarocene – cannot be abstractly coalitional. Instead, it must be grounded in capitalism's work-relations, linking paid and unpaid work, human and extra-human lives (The Salvage Collective 2021). Planetary justice will succeed or fail according to how capably the world's re/producing classes draw on the actual and latent work-centered unities forged by capitalist development – again, taking seriously the *Manifesto*'s geographical logic (Harvey 1998). These differentiated unities find their common thread in the Planetary Proletariat. From this vantage point, we can bring into focus the unifying movements of capitalism's geographies of work, life and power. Here we discover a necessary vista of the class struggle in the web of life, swirling about the differential unities of paid and unpaid work, of humans and the rest of nature. This is the interpenetrating, overlapping and porous trinity of the proletariat, femitariat, and biotariat (see, Moore 2021b, 2021c, 2021d).



## Abstract pluriversalism & its discontents

I am now going to risk of the intellectual equivalent of “farting in a lift” – to borrow a joke from my friend Raj Patel. I want to begin by communicating my gratitude to the co-editors for inviting me to join a dialogue on pluriversalism, knowing well that I would challenge its guiding threads (Lunden & Tornel 2021). From the outset, let me stipulate that scholars’ ongoing efforts to recuperate indigenous cosmologies and practices are necessary to any planetary justice project. However, it does not follow that any of these are outside modernity.

In the editors’ call for papers, I want to flag the following problems for debate: 1) it conflates the bourgeois abstraction of the Anthropocene with the dialectical abstraction of the Capitalocene, suggesting that these are right and left variants of a modernist position; 2) in so doing, it recapitulates political ontology’s caricature of historical materialism as a variant of Western universalism; 3) it reproduces a confusion between levels of abstraction and geographical scale, falsely suggesting that world-ecology approaches are mono-scalar rather than multi-scalar, despite the latter’s repeated insistence on linking the biosphere and body, the sites of re/production and world accumulation, through the mediations of capital, class and empire; 4) it privileges fetishisms like “economic growth” (and de-growth) in an explicit disavowal of “naming the system”; and not least (!) (5) it dispenses with the need to connect radical politics to the long-run historical-geographical formation and development of *capitalogenic* climate change since 1492.

Pluriversalism and its cognates self-present as heterodox and inclusive; they are, in fact, deeply exclusionary. They project a bourgeois flattening of proletarian dialectics, contending that world-historicizations of capital and class, science and empire, are irremediably *modern*. This makes for some significant blind spots. In one of the most intriguing, the co-editors for this special issue propose the Anthropocene as “disrupt[ive]... [of] the Nature/Culture divide.” This is a widely-circulated claim. What bears underlining is that Chakrabarty and Latour – the co-editors’ points of reference – are unabashedly class-denialist and anti-dialectical. Chakrabarty’s audacious reduction of class struggle and class politics to an abstract “inequality” even leads him to argue a counterfactual: a “more egalitarian and just [world]... *the climate crisis would be worse! Our collective carbon footprint would only be larger*” (Chakrabarty 2014: 11). Ours? Whose? The “footprint” *must* be larger because, after all, capitalism and socialism are the same. There is no alternative.

Like pluriversal arguments generally, Chakrabarty and Latour practice a philosophy of *external relations*, narrating a “collision” of essences. The consequences of such a view are enormous. An externalist philosophy of relations drinks deeply from the well of Cartesian rationality and its ontological prioritization of substances over relations. The externalist framework “holds that there are both ‘things’... ([or] ‘factors’) and relations, but that they are logically independent of each other... [In this perspective,] the relations between two or more things can undergo dramatic changes and even disappear altogether without affecting the qualities by which we recognize” (Ollman 2015: 10). Recognizing this externalist philosophy allows us to make sense of Mignolo’s curious vista of political possibility. In this pluralist framework, “Western universalism has the right to coexist in the pluriverse of meaning. Stripped of its pretended universality, Western cosmology would be one of many cosmologies” – as if European Universalism has been a disembodied worldview rather than the world bourgeoisie’s practical hammer of world domination.

The pluriversal affinity with anti-dialectical thinkers like Latour and Chakrabarty is reasonable within its anti-communist framework. Notwithstanding pluriversalism's superficial endorsement of diversity, the thrust of the argument is clear: they must deny the dialectical character of arguments constructed through the philosophy of internal relations (Chakrabarty 2014). For Latour, "capitalism does not exist" (Latour 1988: 173). In Latour's exceedingly unfortunate case, capital-denialism leads to the unsavory formulation of the "Earthbound" and its predictable call for the "defense... of the European homeland" (Latour 2018). As for Chakrabarty, the "logic" of capitalism and the "history of life on this planet" are externalized. They have no "intrinsic" connection. *Intrinsic?* Wobble words like this run through Chakrabarty's arguments. These two moments of capital and life certainly enjoy a dialectical relation. This was, after all, Marx and Engels' argument in *The German Ideology*, positing an active relation between webs of life, "modes of life," and "modes of production" (Marx & Engels 2010: 31).

The *active* relation between "mode of production" and the "history of life on this planet" is much more pivotal to historical materialism than Chakrabarty supposes (2009: 217). Dialectics allows for the non-reductive incorporation of, for instance, volcanic activity in the history of class society. A hugely consequential relation, to be sure! The *internal* moment of the philosophy of internal relations does not presume that volcanic activity is somehow subsumed by capital. Rather, *internal*, like *totality*, is a methodological procedure that allows for the interpretive integration of "natural forcing" into the making of class society and its crises (Moore 2017c). This culminates in today's *capitalogenic* forcing and the unmaking of capitalism. It's this dialectical recognition that is implicit in the environmental justice slogan, "There is no such thing as a natural disaster."

In step with political ontology, Chakrabarty maintains that Marxism is totalizing, and finding that it doesn't linearly explain everything, condemns it to the dustbin of history. But historical materialism pivots on the dialectical consideration of "natural forcing" (e.g., solar minima and maxima, orbital variations, volcanism, etc.) in the history of class society. It dialectically joins "earth formation" and "social formation" with an appreciation of the "swerve of the atom" (see, Chakrabarty 2014; Foster 2000; Altvater 2016). Chakrabarty's externalist view blinds him to the dialectical alternative staring him in the face. Thus, he consistently mis-represents the Capitalocene thesis – both Malm's and mine – which does precisely what Chakrabarty advocates, albeit in dialectical mode: reveal the differentiated unity of "force" as unevenly geophysical and geohistorical (Chakrabarty 2021: 161ff). This is among historical materialism's animating insights: the "twofold relation" – natural and social – of the forces and relations of production in class society (Marx & Engels 2010: 43).

What kind of pluriversalism for what kind of politics, in what kind of planetary crisis? Arturo Escobar's recent intervention is worth considering as we reflect upon the question (Escobar 2018). Escobar's pluriversalism comes uncomfortably close to Third Way politics. Popularized during the Clinton-Blair years, Third Way politics span most of the twentieth century<sup>5</sup>. Allegedly neither left nor right, Third Way politics in its leftwing expression self-presents as always authentically more radical than the socialist and communist left, who are – we are told – imprisoned in the iron thought-cage of modernity.

Pluriversalism belongs to something called political ontology. Among its foundations is a post-Cold War formulation in subaltern form: the clash of civilizations (Huntington 1993). Blaser underlines three points. First, "'Europe' operates as a metonym for modernity" (Blaser 2013: 548). Second, we must critique and deny the myth that "the

encounter with Europeans is the single most important constitutive factor in the historical trajectory of any given social formation” (Blaser 2009: 881). Third, there are “many... stories *in spite of Europe*, that is, stories that are not *easily* brought into the fold of modern categories” (Blaser 2013: 548). (Easily?) Marisol de la Cadena finds no meaningful difference between “liberal and socialist projects” (de la Cadena 2015: 143, *passim*). Mignolo arrives at the same conclusion, creatively interpreting the postwar non-aligned movement as resistance to “capitalist *and* communist imperial designs” – somehow forgetting that socialist states and communist-led revolutionary movements were the fundamental counter-tendency to US-backed fascism and ecocide in the Third World (Mignolo 2011: xiii). Sometimes, decolonial thinkers say the quiet part out loud. Fondly quoting Third Way philosopher Agnes Heller – who saw no meaningful difference between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union – Escobar dismisses state socialism as a “dictatorship of needs” (Heller 2010; Escobar 2018: 108). On this view, dialectics are incurably infected by “modernism”: “its aspiration to universality, totality, teleology, and truth” (Escobar 2018: 36). This abstract pluriversalism, under cover of a seemingly radical critique, recapitulates key elements of Cold War anticommunism and Eurocentrism – above all, the reification of “Europe,” which exists neither as civilization nor as a metonym before 1492.

Among the sentiments we find in pluriversalism is a classic Third Way formulation: neither capitalism nor socialism. Or: neither Anthropocene nor Capitalocene. Instead, we are told, the problems of world-historical transition, fundamental to the unfolding epochal crisis of capitalism, can be politically addressed through “re-worlding.” (Politically? Or is it anti-politically?) Figures like Mignolo want to eat their cake and have it too, making arguments that cohere only within the domain of “world-shattering phrases.” He wants “pluriversality as a universal project,” through which “the universal cannot have one single owner.” (Note the conflation between world-historical process and bourgeois Universalism.) It “corresponds with the Zapatistas’ vision of a world in which many worlds coexist.” Recognizing the bind in which pluriversalism finds itself, Mignolo insists that his perspective is “not cultural relativism, but the entanglement of several cosmologies connected today in a power differential” (Mignolo 2018: x).

The source of that power differential? Of course, it cannot be class or capital. Nor can it be imperialism as a world-historical force. At the end, we are left with the metaphysic of coloniality that denies capitalism’s centrality in the making of planetary crisis – and denies the constitutive linkage between the structures of knowledge, ideology and capital in the web of life. The source of that “power differential” – for Mignolo, Blaser, and countless others – is “Europe,” the “coloniality of power” abstracted from world history.

Paradoxically, this critique of Eurocentrism ends up proving the European miracle (Wallerstein 1999). Removed from the Transition Debate are the constitutive relations of civilizational crisis, imperial advance, and class struggle that defined the passages from feudalism to capitalism (Moore 2007, 2021f). This erasure of early modern capitalism is common to the critique of Eurocentric historiography (Frank 1998; Pomeranz 2000). Mignolo is explicit on the point: early capitalism becomes the “Atlantic commercial circuit” (Mignolo & Ennis 2001). Here Gunder Frank, the dependency radical turned Chicago-style monetarist, and Mignolo, the decolonial champion, find common ground in a circulationist (and class-denialist) reading of early modern world history (Frank 1988). A miraculous account of the Rise of the West indeed.

## Internationalism & the perils of 'Groupism'

In this miraculous perspective, not only is world history epiphenomenal; *all* interpretations of capitalism's world history are Eurocentric. This erasure is wildly disabling to any emancipatory project that must be concretely internationalist if it is to resist and transcend the prevailing superpowers' global economic, ideological, and military might.

The rejection of internationalism is linked to what Rogers Brubaker (2004) calls *groupism*. It relies on a form of status-group ontogenesis, common to many nationalisms (Hechter 1977). Groupism embraces subjectivities of varied ascriptive identities resulting from capitalism's uneven and combined development. Its typical mode of argumentation regards these varied identities as something outside of modern world history – an eternal independent, rather than historically dependent, variable. Groupism is:

*the tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis (and basic constituents of the social world)... It has managed to withstand a quarter century of constructivist theorizing in the social sciences, a sustained critique of reification in anthropology and other disciplines, the influential and destabilizing contributions of feminist, post-structuralist, post-modernist, and other theories, and even the widespread acknowledgment, in principle, that 'cultures,' 'communities,' 'tribes,' 'races,' 'nations,' and 'ethnic groups' are not bounded wholes. Despite these and other developments, ethnic and other groups continue to be conceived as entities and cast as actors... 'Groupness' is a variable, not a constant; it cannot be presupposed (Brubaker 2004: 2–4).*

Pluriversalist groupism lends itself especially to a romantic politics of “life territories” allegedly outside of capitalism's five centuries of conquest, commodification, and class formation in the web of life. Correctly recognizing the largely defensive character of peasant and worker struggles across the neoliberal era, pluriversalism commits to a strategic error: the reification of *defense*, a word that appears dozens of times in Escobar's book. Worse still, *defense* is bound to ethnonational claims of political *detachment* from class struggle and ontological *attachment* between “life worlds” and “territories” (Escobar 2018: ix). (My guess is that widespread sympathy for indigenous struggles – often heroic and inspiring for me as well – has silenced radical critique that questions the reifications such struggles internalize in their calls for “tradition,” a fraught form of politics to say the least!) (Taylor 2019). While practically speaking, defensive struggles against capitalist enclosure and exploitation are vital, they constitute neither a political program nor a revolutionary vision capable of engaging today's planetary crisis.

The “defense of... life territories” – in Escobar's unfortunate language – readily lends itself to the second erasure: of working-class internationalism under cover of a subtle but powerful anticommunism (Escobar 2018: 21). Some version of this phrase, *defense of life territories*, runs like a red thread through political ontology. Shorn of a world-historical vista on worldwide class dynamics, however, such formulations lead to a clash-of-civilizations worldview. In this groupist reading of the Cold War thesis, defense of “life territories” is not a means to building practical internationalism, but a particularist program. Abstract pluriversalism trades in easy and superficial judgments of actually existing internationalism, which from the beginning proceeded through “unity in difference.” The dismissal of dialectics is intimately to this anticommunism, drawing on the Cold War formula that equates fascism and state socialism.

The linguistic acrobatics performed to avoid naming capitalism – or decentering it in word salads like “the heteropatriarchal capitalist modern/colonial world system” – are impressive (Escobar 2018: xii). Such acrobatics are the stock in trade of *abstract pluriversalism*, which refuses to make the world-historical connections between imperialism, racism, sexism and worldwide class formation. Google search-string expressions like Escobar’s short-circuit our capacities to think through imperialism – and its constitutive Civilizing Projects – as the bourgeoisie’s preferred mode of class formation. For Escobar, imperialism and capitalism appear a nuisance, an irritation. Socialist politics is subjected to a patronizing nostalgia of peasants reading Mao’s *Little Red Book* (Escobar 2018: 35–36). The Chinese Revolution’s success in raising life expectancy from 40 to 65 in just three decades, an unprecedented achievement in human affairs, is beside the point! No, that’s just another “totalitarian” project.

The resulting political ontology is a web of metaphysical claims about modernity – separated from capitalism and class except as lip service or as passing description – that effect a double lacunae. One is the discouragement of world history through a false conflation of “universal” and world-historical. Mignolo puts the matter bluntly, refusing capitalism’s differentiated unity by obscuring the difference: “*a world history or a universal history is an impossible task*” (Mignolo 2012: 21). Never mind that these are not the same!

For Marx and Engels, capitalism’s universalization is shorthand for developing world-historical antagonisms – a unity in difference that takes variation as its point of departure and motivation. Theirs is a *critique* of European Universalism. Rather than find common ground with Marx and Engels, decolonial thinkers confuse matters. This is nowhere clearer than in their conflation of Kantian universalism – premised on “the achievement of a universal civic society which administers law among men” – with historical materialism’s emancipatory horizon, premised on the “*real movement*” of class struggle in its “world-historical existence” (Kant 1784; Marx & Engels 2010: 482). This imprecision is ideologically-licensed: anticommunism is a powerful opiate. Its effect is to flatten Marxism and silence an enduring tradition of anti-imperialist socialism with deep roots in national liberation struggles – reaching critical mass with the early twentieth century’s great social revolutions in Mexico and Russia (Dussel 2002).

For historical materialism, the history of class society in the web of life proceeds *through* variation and unevenness – not in spite of it. I know I repeat myself – but I risk pedantry in the face of chronic mischaracterization emanating from new materialist, political ontology, actor network, and other academic vogues. Unity in difference is the dialectical imagination’s methodological core. It is a relentlessly curious and connective historical method that allows us to construct specific totalities from the standpoint of capitalism’s pivotal contradictions. *Totality* is a methodological procedure unfolding through the *immanent* critique of capital. It is not an empirical statement. Rather, the “point of view of totality” is a means of demystifying capitalism’s laws of motion and its abstract Universalism – to see beyond the limits of capitalism’s reifications (Lukács 1971). It is the “situated” standpoint of the planetary proletariat, in its combined and uneven mosaics of paid and unpaid work, exploitation and appropriation, and human and extra-human natures.

The dialectical imagination begins, proceeds, and concludes – again, provisionally – with the “interpenetration of opposites” (Marx & Engels 1987: 356). *Opposites* are not ontologically independent but relationally co-produced. This explains the apparent paradox of Marx’s dialectical naturalism and dialectical humanism, through which the labor process unevenly transforms specific environments and human social relations in



the web of life (Marx 1976: 283). Predictably, political ontologists routinely assert that for Marx, “nature is unhistorical” (de la Cadena 2015: 147). This would surprise Marx and Engels, who insisted that all historical writing must set out from “natural bases” and “their [subsequent] modification”!

For Marx, the world-historical movement of capitalism produces and is constituted through all manner of counter-tendencies. European Universalism is, from this standpoint, revealed as not only a “ruling idea” but as continuously shaped by its counter-tendencies, not least the “developing tendencies” of anti-capitalist revolt, resistance and revolution (Lukács 1971). The dialectical insistence that every socio-ecological process forms *through* connective and asymmetrical variation is a *critique* of positivist totalization. It is a historical method for making sense of capitalism as an evolving and uneven world-ecology of power, profit and life. From this standpoint, neither “Europe” nor “the Americas” exist as geosocial formations before 1492; *capitalism* does not form within Europe and *then* conquer the world (Quijano & Wallerstein 1992; contra Wood 1999). The *emergence* of capitalism was a dynamic of militarized accumulation and Civilizing Projects. These formed and re-formed geosocial formations, including *Europe*, an idea that came into widespread use only in the seventeenth century (Marino 2007; Quijano, 2000). Let’s be clear, despite political ontology’s protestations; capitalism *did* subordinate planetary life to the law of value over the ensuing four centuries – but not in the way that political ontology’s linear and positive caricatures would have it. It was combined and uneven and formed through its decisive counter-tendency: the formation of the planetary proletariat and its trinity of the proletariat, femitariat, and biotariat (Silver & Slater 1999; Moore 2015). To paraphrase Marx, this trinity speaks to the “original sources” of surplus-value, spanning the apparent divides of human and extra-human life, paid and unpaid work. The history of capitalism’s law of value – a law of Cheap Nature – is a historical-geographical movement of worldwide class formation. Its historical development holds forth and the possibility for the revolutionary transcendence of capitalism.

## Dialectical Universalism, or the standpoint of the Planetary Proletariat

What kind of universalism? What kind of pluriversalism? Surely there are many possible answers. Let’s avoid collapsing the difference between epistemological and ideological European Universalism – which flattens differences – and assessments of capitalism’s world history and the emancipatory possibilities of working-class internationalism. When Marx and Engels speak of “universalizing” tendencies, they signify the “real movement” of capitalism’s world-historical contradictions. This movement is constituted through tendencies and countertendencies: the interpenetration of opposites. The classic instance is Marx’s discussion of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (Marx 1981). It applies equally to the history of imperialism and anti-imperialist struggles, which is to say the worldwide class struggle in the web of life.

For dialectical materialism, the world history of class society – and capitalism in particular – proceeds *through* variation, not in spite of it. Dialectical materialism not only proceeds through difference but explores the inner relations that simultaneously flatten variation and produce it anew. It is connective and historical. It is open to the

webs of life that are at once products and producers of the capitalist world-ecology (Moore 2017c). Call it a dialectical universalism or a dialectical pluriversalism, whatever one prefers. Such a method insists that relationality is structured by webs of power and re/production in *actually existing* world history. It is an approach mindful of the real conditions of international solidarity created by capitalism itself (Silver & Slater 1999). This allows the re/producing classes – in fits and starts – to identify the international conditions of bourgeois rule and the imperative for internationalist solidarity against that rule.

Historical materialism, then, rejects the fashion of assemblage and political ontology approaches favoring a “democratic theory of causation.” Listing capitalism’s “bads” – racism, sexism, colonialism, class, and so forth – evades and indeed undermines efforts to connect these dynamics as differential internal moments of each other. In this light, everything becomes an “assemblage,” everything is reduced to conjuncture. And yet, history cannot be wished away. Capitalism’s world history is messy, contingent, but nevertheless patterned. A materialist philosophy of internal relations licenses the interpretation of world history as a “rich totality of many determinations,” articulating a method that pursues uneven yet combined geographies (Marx 1993: 99; Wallerstein 1974). Given capitalism’s unique logic of endless accumulation, which requires the endless appropriation and capitalization of the Earth – and therefore places planetary life at the center of its world-historical project – the world-ecology alternative foregrounds the centrality of an internationalist response to the biospheric dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

This standpoint allows us to go beyond a clash of civilizations between an essential Europeanness pitted against indigenist and other ethnonational identities. It alerts us to the danger of the widespread critical tendency to erase the pioneering contributions of race/class and gender/class super-exploitation in the name of abstracted patriarchy and racism. These lacunae – delinking the ideological formation of sexism and racism from the history of class formation and struggle – lead to an externalist collision of essences (“race, class, gender”). As such, they preclude the revolutionary syntheses of, for instance, Silvia Federici and W.E.B. Du Bois, situating racism and sexism as ideological mechanisms of the “ultimate exploitation” of, and the reproduction of cultural divisions within, the proletariat (Federici 2004; Du Bois 1935: 15). As Federici and Du Bois emphasize, the “proletarian struggle” is not one of abstractly combined “intersections” but rather determined through their world-historical interrelations, internationalist on both sides of the world-class struggle in the most thoroughgoing fashion (Federici 2004: 40; see also Linebaugh & Rediker 2000).

Too often, “decolonization” proceeds through the form of appearance identified (and critiqued) famously by Fanon – without however Fanon’s attentiveness to the dialectical antagonisms of colonial class structures, enabled by racism but not propelled by it (Fanon 1963/1961). As C.L.R. James reminds us: “to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous,” although – as James and Fanon make clear – to think of imperialism (the bourgeoisie’s preferred mode of class formation) without race is clearly absurd (James 1989: 283). Fanon underlined the point in 1956: “the apparition of racism is not fundamentally determining. *Racism is not the whole but the most visible*” (Fanon 1967: 31–32, emphasis added). Writing the *Wretched of the Earth* in a race against time with leukemia, Fanon continually opens discussions of the colonial situation at the level of appearance – an “us” versus “them” Manichaeism – only to levy his most damning critiques at the “native” petty bourgeoisie and a collaborationist intelligentsia.

Wallerstein, who arranged for the English-language publication of *Wretched* in 1963, underscores Fanon's furious critique of class collaborationism in national liberation struggles. Fanon came to classify

*those of the Third World who were not supporters... as among 'them'... [Fanon's] anger was now primarily directed at the bourgeoisie of the Third World, the exploiters who have emerged to share in the devastation with their erstwhile masters in a neo-colonial hell. Fanon had reverted to his earliest instinct, to a rational militancy based on class analysis (Wallerstein 1970: 229).*

The struggle against the racialized class regimes of the colonial world pivoted on the “international situation.” Such an internationalist politics would smash the “compartmentalizations” of the imperialist world (Fanon 1963: 65, 37ff). In Fanon's view, the struggle for liberation turned on internationalism, forging “the community of interests between the working classes of the conquering country and the combined population of the conquered and dominated country” (Fanon 1967: 76).

World-ecology privileges an engaged pluralism and an ethics of synthesis committed to building the internationalist solidarities necessary to effectively resist – and thence to socialize – the International of Capital. Those two internationalisms, from above and below, are amplified by the deepening climate crisis, which should be understood as a singular crisis of life-making and profit-making. In this epochal transition, we are witnessing not only the breakdown of capitalism's basic economic mechanisms but also a worldwide turn towards ethno-national authoritarianism: Modi, Trump, Duterte, Bolsonaro, Erdoğan, Orbán and others across eastern Europe. Expressive of this movement in the richest countries – all boast significant rightwing ethno-nationalist movements (Sweden Democrats, German's Alternative for Germany, France's National Rally, Britain's UK Independent Party, and a significant layer of the US GOP) – is the worldwide construction of a “global climate wall.” These climate walls have been aggressively supported by mainstream parties everywhere. Border security spending between 2013 and 2018 sharply increased in the imperialist centers: the United States (34.3 percent); Germany (35.6 percent); Great Britain (30.5 percent); France (29.9 percent); and Australia (a whopping 70.9 percent) (Miller *et al.* 2021: 21). As US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi made clear at the recent COP 26 meetings (2021), the climate crisis is a security problem. When the most powerful figures in the world say the quiet part aloud, believe them (Democracy Now! November 10, 2021).

Punctuated by ethno-national “anti-terror” legislation, border militarization, and Covid-inspired surveillance states, liberal democracy is showing clear signs of decomposition in the twenty-first century. The long wave of bourgeois democratization that began in earnest with the revolutions of 1848 is coming to an end (Berberoglu 2020). This is directly linked to capitalism's developing planetary crisis: its surplus capital overhang and an increasingly unpredictable spiral of climate events (Moore 2021f). Capitalism is driven by contradictions, to be sure – above all between semi-peripheral authoritarian nationalisms and the “masters of the universe” who gather each year at the Alpine ski resort in Davos. For all their differences, both fractions of the world bourgeoisie are well aware of the gravity of the crisis. Both are gravitating towards one or another “tributary” solution – to borrow Samir Amin's concept – to capitalism's epochal crisis (Amin 1974: 140). A tributary mode of production is one in which *politics* guarantees the accumulators of the surplus, a qualitative generalization of late capitalism's “too big to fail” guarantees to finance capital. The move towards

a tributary resolution for the planetary crisis is entirely unthreatened by particularist struggles to defend “life territories”—indeed, the worldwide tendency towards bourgeois authoritarianism is happy with such discourses and their politics (Forchtner 2019).

The world left is not well-positioned to halt these tendencies and organize an internationalist response (see, Baker *et al.* 2021). On the contrary, at the very moment when working-class internationalism is most necessary, a critical mass of intellectuals have embraced assemblage, actor-network, political ontology, pluriversal and other approaches that deny the connective historical and geographical asymmetries of capitalism as a “world-historical fact” (Marx & Engels 2010: 51). To play with an old French expression: one can ignore global politics, but it will not ignore you.

## Planetary justice and the Planetary Proletariat: towards a Biotarian internationalism

The flight from world history disables ways of thinking necessary to advance a politics of planetary justice at the end of the Holocene. Those politics will need to be internationalist. At the same time, socialism will come – if it comes at all – unevenly, and the world history of socialist revolutions and national liberation movements needs to be taken seriously. A strategy for gaining and defending territorial power in order to reconstruct the relations of re/production in the interests of a broadly defined sustainability is non-optional. We live in a century where sea-level change, just to cite one prominent example, will compel the worldwide reconstruction of town-country divisions of labor. We cannot ignore politics because we dislike it. As Christian Parenti reminds us, the planetary crisis is *already* setting motion disasters “that call forth the state. How the state responds [and what kinds of states we organize] is a different question: sometimes it fails, but always it is called” (Parenti 2016: 183).

Absent a world-historical critique, radical arguments tend to reproduce one-sided visions that incorporate one or the other pole of the ruling binary: Nature and Society. This can take the form of an abstract localism paired with empty rhetorical gestures towards ecological holism: “Think Globally, Act Locally” (Albo 2006). Its leading intellectual exponent is Latour, whose “Earthbound concrete” reproduces an older epistemology of regional particularism and the primacy of parts over wholes (Latour 2018). Or it can take the form of “accelerationism,” rightly grasping the technological possibilities of capitalism and political imperatives of internationalism, but abstracted from the historical natures that channel and constrain that technological history (Srniczek & Williams 2016; see also Moore 2015). Both peasantist and accelerationist tendencies acknowledge significant truths. The challenge before us today is to join these in a higher synthesis. To paraphrase Mao, such a guiding thread must join varied hues of Green, Red and “expert” in an internationalist vision of planetary justice – and socialist reconstruction. Those threads must, at a minimum, proceed from a recognition of the Planetary Proletariat’s connective tissues and the trinity of capitalist work, whose threefold character can be abbreviated in the provisional formula: *proletariat* (human paid work), *femitariat* (unpaid human work), *biotariat* (the largely unpaid but valorized work of life as a whole).

The Planetary Proletariat emerged through capitalism’s successive world-ecological revolutions – and vice-versa. Its formation was coterminous with the geocultural invention of Europe in the long – and cold – seventeenth century (Linebaugh &

Rediker 2000; Moore 2021f). Hence the uneven but virtually simultaneous formation of the climate class divide, climate patriarchy, and climate apartheid at this time. Against the international of capital, geographically and occupationally diverse working-class movements sought to mobilize on a world-scale. Successive socialist and communist internationals were only the tip of the iceberg. Watershed internationalist conferences – Baku in 1920, Bandung in 1955 – suggested the possibilities, even if unrealized and frustrated by the contradictions of populist nationalism and proletarian struggle, of a global democratic alternative to European Universalism and America’s Cold War hegemony. Internationalism brought crucial solidarity against the American war in Vietnam and established robust networks that struggled against American support for Third World fascism from Indonesia to El Salvador. Cuban solidarity with Angola’s revolutionaries prevented the new country’s subordination to South African imperialism, and in time, contributed directly to the end of the apartheid regime (Gleijeses 2002).

A world-historical assessment of capitalism, and its conditions of emergence, reveals both the constraints and possibilities of revolutionary transformation in the late Capitalocene – and in the not-yet-too late Holocene. Such assessments alert us to the hazards of utopian speculation. *Utopian*, not in the sense of creative and experimental post-capitalist imaginaries, but rather in the classical Marxist appreciation: the disconnection of socialist vision from the history of capitalism, its revolutionary challengers, and the commitment of the imperialist forces to “destroy the village in order to save it.” The pluriversalists, in their flight from history, have no way of reckoning and mobilizing the countervailing historical forces that might allow for their “re-worlding” transition – and no program for defending revolutionary gains once realized. (What to do when economic sanctions are imposed, special forces arrive, drones deploy, and the bombers come, never appears in such discussions.)

Marx once quipped that ideas can become “material forces” when seized upon by the proletariat – a point just as true for the bourgeoisie in its revolutionary period (Marx 1970: 137). What defined European Universalism’s revolutionary cosmology? More than anything, it was a materialism that challenged feudalism’s teleological metaphysics (Foster 2000). Its core was bourgeois humanism and its necessary antonym, bourgeois naturalism. Out of this rupture emerged not only new philosophies but new *technics* – new practical tools of empire and capital, like the new cartographies, new accounting techniques, and new ways of sorting out which humans were civilized and which humans were not. The “long” sixteenth century witnessed not only the “discovery of mankind” but its invention (Abulafia 2008). *Nature* became everything that Civilized Man was not.

The roots of Cheap Nature and its double register – economic exploitation and geocultural domination – are found in modern imperialism. Imperialism is the bourgeoisie’s preferred mode of class formation because it more readily brings to bear the military and juridical power of states, who must pursue “cheap” class formation to pay the bankers and create good business environments. Imperialism doesn’t happen for free. It’s financed by bankers, not taxes – which go to paying the bankers in a horrific alchemy of world money, world power, and world nature (Patel & Moore 2017; Arrighi 1994; Antonacci 2021). It is a procedure of domination aimed at advancing the rate of profit and resolving the problem of surplus capital endemic to capitalism.

The now-commonplace expression that we should “decolonize” our thinking communicates something essential. Namely, we must resist any acceptance of capitalism’s self-representation – which is, of course, not one of class struggle but one of the Civilizing Project and Man against Nature. This is the arrogance of European Universalism and its erasure of class politics in favor of Progress: the world-historical



march of Weber’s “European rationality of world domination” (Altvater 2016). The march of social, cultural, and economic rationality civilizes the un-civilized, develops the undeveloped. The fruits of capitalist development are gifts to the “savages,” those humans variously unable or unwilling to accept Progress. In this cosmology, Civilization represented the best of Mankind. Those who resisted were unreasonable and irrational; notwithstanding their biology, these humans, invariably but not exclusively colonial subjects, were part of Nature, not Civilization (Patel & Moore 2017). So, it was the bourgeoisie that came to “over-represent” itself as *Man*, the better that most humans, and the rest of life, could be *under*-represented as Nature, and correspondingly devalued (Wynter 2003).

In the flight from history – “Please don’t say Capitalocene!” – there is also a flight from two insights of historical materialism. One is that class society is always with and within webs of life. The second, no less fundamental, is that class societies in the web of life generate contradictions that cannot be fixed within a given mode of production and its class structure. While dialectical thinking unfolds *through* variations, it doesn’t reify these. Instead, it focuses on the real historical movement of socio-ecological forces and relations as a “rich totality of many determinations.” All that is solid may well melt into air, but the dialectic of fixity and motion cannot be abolished. Here is a world-historical rather than abstract pluriversalism that grounds the possibilities for human and extra-human liberation in the history of capitalism. It points towards a Biotarian socialism capable of practically addressing the planetary crisis through internationalist solidarity.

*Proletariat. Femitarat. Biotariat.* These are the relational pivots of the Planetary Proletariat, formed in the seventeenth-century climate crisis, and now returning, with a vengeance, at the end of the Holocene. Here is a revolutionary standpoint indeed, one fearlessly embracing a dialectical humanism and a dialectical naturalism, one that celebrates the creativity and potentiality of all forms of life – never equally, always in relation (Lukács 1998; Moore 2021d). If European Universalism over-represents the Civilizing Project and its Promethean aspirations, a proletarian universalism grasps the distinctiveness of life-forms and workforces connected through capitalism’s violent syntheses of social formation and earth formation.

Dialectical universalism guides us to see class politics through a relational and *eductive* lens: an optic that draws out the complexity of diverse relations of work, life, and power, unified but never flattened through capitalist development. Here is an anti-formalist and anti-Eurocentric analytic that pursues the possibility for a new metabolism of planetary justice. In this, a certain reverence for the *oikeios* – the generative, creative, and multi-layered pulse of life-making – can and should be woven into hard-headed assessments of capitalism’s world-ecological antagonisms (Moore 2015). (We are back, once again, to Marx’s “swerve of the atom.”) In place of one-sided localisms and globalisms, we can cultivate internationalist responses to the explosive volatility of late capitalism, always with an eye to modernity’s “weak links.” Only then can the imperial bourgeoisie’s Sword of Damocles be beaten into ploughshares. Only then can those ploughshares be reinvented and put to work by the “associated producers” – and reproducers! – in the web of life (Marx 1981: 568ff).

## Endnotes

1. Key texts include Moore JW (2015) *Capitalism in the Web of Life*. Verso, London; Patel R & Moore JW (2017) *A History of Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*. University of California Press, Berkeley; Moore JW (2016) *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* PM Press, Oakland, CA; Brenner N (2019) *New Urban Spaces*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Recent contributions include Campbell C, Niblett M & Oloff K (2021; eds.) *Literary and Cultural Production, World-Ecology, and the Global Food System*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York; Gibson K (2021) *Subsumption as Development: A World-Ecological Critique of the South Korean 'Miracle'*. PhD dissertation, Environmental Studies, York University; Dixon MW (2021) *Phosphate Rock Frontiers: Nature, Labor, and Imperial States, from 1870 to World War II*. *Critical Historical Studies* 8(2): 271–307; Otter C (2020) *Diet for a Large Planet: Industrial Britain, Food Systems, and World-Ecology*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago; Boscov-Ellen D (2021) *After the Flood: Political Philosophy in the Capitalocene*. PhD dissertation, Philosophy, New School for Social Research; Jakes AG (2020) *Egypt's Occupation: Colonial Economism and the Crises of Capitalism*. Stanford University Press, Stanford; and the essays collected in Molinero Gerbeau Y & Avallone G (2021; eds.) *Ecología-Mundo, Capitaloceno y Acumulación Global Parte 1*. Relaciones Internacionales, 46; Molinero Gerbeau Y & Avallone G (2021b) *Ecología-Mundo, Capitaloceno y Acumulación Global Parte 2*. Relaciones Internacionales, 47. Several hundred texts in the world-ecology conversation can be found here: <https://www.academia.edu/Documents/in/World-Ecology>.
2. A representative sampling includes: Moore JW (2000) *Environmental Crises and the Metabolic Rift in World-Historical Perspective*. *Organization & Environment* 13(2): 123–158; Moore JW (2003) *Nature and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*. *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* 26(2): 97–172; Moore JW (2010) 'Amsterdam is Standing on Norway', Part I: The Alchemy of Capital, Empire, and Nature in the Diaspora of Silver, 1545-1648. *The Journal of Agrarian Change* 10(1): 33–68; Moore JW (2010b) 'Amsterdam is Standing on Norway', Part II: The Global North Atlantic in the Ecological Revolution of the Seventeenth Century. *The Journal of Agrarian Change* 10(2): 188–227; Moore JW (2017) *The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis*. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44(3): 594–630; Moore JW (2018) *The Capitalocene, Part II: Accumulation by Appropriation and the Centrality of Unpaid Work/Energy*. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45(2): 237–279.
3. The precise quotation, from a US Army major in the midst of 1968's Tet Offensive, was reported at the time by Arnett P (1968) *The Only Way to 'Save' City was to Destroy It*. Associated Press, 7 February, 1968.
4. Here I lean on Giovanni Arrighi's Three Questions. See Arrighi G (1994) *The Long Twentieth Century*. Verso, London; Moore JW (2011) *Ecology, Capital, and the Nature of Our Times*. *Journal of World-Systems Research* 17(1): 108–147.
5. For a penetrating sketch of Third Way politics over the past century, see Dale G (2019) *Justificatory fables of ordoliberalism: Laissez-faire and the 'third way'*. *Critical Sociology* 45(7–8): 1047–1060.

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