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A Call for the Inclusion of Nature in Class Struggle

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A Call for the Inclusion of Nature in Class Struggle

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Introduction

What matters is whether nature is to be dominated one-sidedly for narrow human ends, or whether, in a society of associated producers, the alienation of human beings from nature and from each other will no longer be the *precondition* for human existence, but will be recognized for what it is: the estrangement of all that is human.

Haila and Levins, *Humanity and Nature*¹

The question that this thesis seeks to answer is straightforward: how does the global framework set up by the existence of nation states inform our relationship to nature as an object to be exploited rather than as a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature? As I watch the world struggle to respond to the current Covid-19 global crisis, with little international solidarity to speak of, I am left feeling hopeless about the next global crisis that is looming on the horizon, and that for some communities has already arrived. In 2016, 42% of US citizens were not worried about climate change.² At the same time, 2016 was the third year in a row where record global temperatures were set. While some communities still have not felt its impact, climate change has already led millions of people to the brink of desperation. It is difficult to find data on the number of people that have been displaced due to climate change internationally, as climate disasters and other situations of conflict or violence are often interrelated, but the UNHCR estimates that in 2017 there were approximately 18.8 million new climate disaster-related internal displacements.³ As sea level rise threatens the existence of entire nations, other nation-states' borders remain closed to climate refugees, a term that has not yet

¹ Yrjö Haila and Richard Levins, *Humanity and Nature: Ecology, Science and Society* (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 11.

² Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, "Yale Climate Opinion Maps - U.S. 2016." Accessed April 28, 2020.

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Climate Change and Disaster Displacement." UNHCR. Accessed April 29, 2020.

been recognized in international law. At the same time, nation-states are slow to act against climate change, unable or unwilling to reign in the industries that drive their economic growth while accelerating environmental degradation. Even as top US government officials deny the gravity of the situation, the Department of Defense views climate change as “an urgent and growing threat to our national security”⁴, and the Pentagon is preparing itself for this threat by, for example, bolstering the defense of their facilities. Although climate change is clearly no longer an issue that can be ignored, and almost any political movement is tinged with ecological awareness, most mainstream discussions on the environment cannot escape a deeply nationalistic conception of nature. Despite the fact that the idea of the nation state as we know it is a relatively modern invention, its existence is often assumed to outlast almost any catastrophe, and it seems to be easier to discuss ways of changing the planet's climatic cycles than to reorganize our political structures. The nation state as a political institution has deeply changed the relationship between humans and their environment, and relies on the view of nature as a resource and land as territory in order to uphold its power. This alienation from nature impedes one’s ability to create a balanced relationship between humans and nature, and instead we are hurling towards one climate catastrophe after another.

This senior project considers the above assertion in three steps. It shows how (1) the global framework that has been set up by the existence of nation states relies on viewing land as territory and nature as a resource and how (2) resource extraction industries rely on this global framework by profiting from the way territory has been viewed historically through the process of empire building, and this in turn (3) informs our relationship to nature as an object to be

⁴ Michael Klare, “If the US Military Is Facing up to the Climate Crisis, Shouldn’t We All?” *The Guardian*, November 12, 2019, sec. Opinion.

exploited instead of as a reciprocal relationship between human and non-human nature. Throughout this project I have leaned heavily, both in terms of concepts and the language used, on John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology*, Jason Moore's *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, and Immanuel Wallerstein and Étienne Balibar's *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. My work then situates itself, comfortably enough, within eco-socialist literature. I use the frameworks of world-systems analysis and class politics to analyze humans' relationship to nature, however, as I reached the third chapter I hoped to contribute something new to this literature; namely, the expansion of class struggle to include non-human nature. This theoretical thesis remains anchored through the historical context of the effect of the coal industry in Appalachia. I started this project through an exploration of coal mining in Appalachia, which pulled me into a web of relations that have all led to the current ecological crisis, and laid out how entangled various actors are in the destruction of nature in not only Appalachia, but globally. It led me down a rabbit hole of the various ways in which the stage has been set for the success of resource extraction industries to thrive while the environment collapses around us, ultimately taking us down with it. And it had, finally, provided a broad framework within which I believe a solution can be found. Throughout this project it has been important, although at times challenging, to remember that although we may all face the same crisis, there is no universal "us", and to keep in mind how limited not only my own perspective is, but also the perspective of the thinkers that I have relied on.

In Chapter 1, the Nation-State World-System, I analyze how the structure of the nation-state came into being, and the tools with which it has been upheld ever since. I use Karatani's in depth analysis of the history of nation-states to explain the ways in which a

nation-state and its people are created, and supplement this understanding with Wallerstein's world-systems analysis to help me explore the relations between nation-states and the role of imperialism and colonization in nation-state building. I argue that the act of colonization already enframes land and nature as territory, which exists to further the growth of the nation-state, rather than existing for its own sake. Finally, in this first chapter I examine the tools that the nation-state uses in order to master nature, expand its territory and appropriate natural resources, and the shortcoming of these same tools when it comes to addressing urgent environmental issues such as climate change. The chapter concludes with the claim that the existence of nation-states precludes a sustainable relation between human and non-human nature.

The Nation-State and Private Industries, my second chapter, focuses on the relationship of interdependence between the nation-state and resource extraction industries. By analyzing capitalism's role in the creation of frontiers of exploitation and appropriation, aided by imperialism, I will show that the existence of the nation-state set the stage for extractive capitalism to succeed, and that this mode of operation is in conflict with the well-being of the environment. In order to ground these claims I look at two extractive industries — the oil industry in Louisiana and coal mining in Appalachia. This helps me emphasize the relation of these industries to politics, and how there is a systematic lack of oversight and accountability. I also highlight the link between these private industries and the use of nationalist ideology in order to advance their interests, a central premise of this chapter. Moore's concept of appropriation becomes crucial to my understanding of the relation between nation-states and capitalism, and paves the way to my third chapter.

The final chapter of this thesis, *Class Struggle and the Environment*, makes the argument that in order to mend the relationship between human and non-human nature, we need to expand our understanding of class politics. I center this chapter around Moore's claim that the struggle to repair these relations is necessarily a part of the class struggle, giving my own interpretation to his caveat that it is not *just* a class struggle. In order to reach the assertion that class politics must be expanded to include non-human nature, I analyze two ways in which nature and class struggle intersect. The structures that I lay out in the first two chapters, combined with a turn to anti-nationalist internationalism in the third chapter, leads me to the conclusion that the inclusion of nature in class politics is necessary to build solidarity between all those that are affected by climate change and to repair the unbalanced relationship between humans and the environment. The final section of this thesis returns once more to Appalachia, in an effort to show concretely how class politics and environmental politics are intimately linked.

Chapter 1: The Nation-State World-System

This chapter analyses how the structure of the nation-state came into being, and the tools with which it has been upheld ever since. I will lay out the ways in which a nation state and its people are created through the exclusion and creation of an other, as a threat from the outside creates greater cohesion within. I will also explore the ways in which weaker nation-states are systematically exploited by stronger ones, and the role of colonialism in creating and replicating the formation of nation-states. This leads to an exploration of the imperialism of nation states and the ways in which this process has shaped the relations between various nation-states as well, specifically looking at the ways this has affected nations with abundant natural resources. Furthermore, I'll address the issue that the well-being of non-human nature cannot be a priority within this system, as it goes against the drive for a mastery of nature that sits at the heart of the nation-state. This mastery of nature is instituted through the mapping of nature, which also serves to sever individuals' relationships to their environment and unbalance the metabolic relationships between humans and the rest of nature. Finally, this chapter looks at the ways in which the current global framework limits our ability to address urgent environmental issues such as climate change, concluding that the existence of nation-states precludes a sustainable relation between human and non-human nature.

Karatani writes in *The Structure of World History*, "The nation-state is a coupling together of two elements with different natures: nation and state. The nation-state's emergence, however, requires the previous appearance of capital-state—that is, a coupling of capital with state."⁵ In

⁵ Kojin Karatani, *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014) 209.

western Europe, the transition to the nation-state manifested itself in the form of the absolute monarch. The creation of an absolute monarchy meant that there was no higher authority than that of the monarch, no empire or church which stood above it. However, the existence of an absolute monarchy suggested the existence of other sovereign monarchies. The sovereignty of this new state “was a claim of authority not only internally but externally—that is, vis-a-vis other states.”⁶ This created a system of separate states which had to not only protect their sovereignty against threats from within the monarchy, but also exterior threats. To this end the monarchy needed a bureaucratic structure to manage its internal authority, and a standing army to assure its claim to sovereignty was accepted by other states as well, by force if need be. Karatani explains that the creation of this bureaucratic structure feudal land rent would be transformed into land taxes, and the aristocracy of the obsolete empire, which had lost its authority as a class of feudal lords, became state bureaucrats. He also argues that it is through the redistribution of collected taxes that the monarchy created the foundation for the welfare state. Through this structure the main mode of exchange, according to Karatani and Bourdaghs, was that of plunder and redistribution, also characterized as domination and protection. Subjects, or citizens, had to subject themselves to the power of the authority, but in turn were protected from authorities outside the state. With the toppling of monarchies through bourgeois revolutions, the principle of commodity exchange was affirmed and capitalism became the predominant economic system, although the previous mode of exchange still holds its place within the state itself. With the abolition of serfdom, commodity production instead relied on the labor power commodity,

⁶ Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004) 43.

opening the way for capitalist production. Finally, the common mode of exchange of reciprocity, the core of community, took the form of the “imagined community” of the nation.

The sovereign was no longer the monarch, instead sovereignty was shifted to the people. Through this shift subjects were transformed into citizens. As Wallerstein notes, “peoplehood is not merely a construct but one which, in each particular instance, has constantly changing boundaries”⁷. If the people are to be sovereign, it needs to be decided who is a part of this group. Through this, the politics of inclusion and of exclusion became a centerpiece of national politics, where those that were excluded sought to be included, and those that were already included often fought to keep a narrow definition of citizenship. Within this fight, the nation-state was able to carefully control who was and was not accepted as a citizen. By maintaining a constant source of non-citizens, of outsiders, the nation-state sought to guarantee its stability. “Nationalism is secured by hostility to enemies. Most states in the core sought to instill this hostility towards some neighbor, on some ground or other.”⁸ This notion of sovereignty and the accompanying interstate system that arose from absolute monarchs created the relationships that are still broadly present today between nations. In order to differentiate between the roles of nations within this framework, I will use Wallerstein’s characterization of strong and weak states.⁹ One of the shared elements of weak states, according to Wallerstein, is the absence of strong bureaucratic

⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein and Étienne Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991) 77.

⁸ Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*, 66.

⁹ For the sake of clarity I will use the terms strong and weak states throughout the essay, with the exception of when I am directly quoting a work that uses different terms, as this is the terminology used by the text on which I am basing much of this chapter. Strong states is used in world-systems analysis to describe a state which has a strong bureaucracy and relatively low levels of corruption and division within the nation-state, and is able to exert its influence on other states. This is not a hard claim as to which term is or is not appropriate to use in this discussion, however it is a way to designate relative positions of nation-states within a linked international system.

structures, weakening a state's ability to govern its internal affairs. This means that a weak state cannot rely on the collection of taxes to the same extent as strong states, and so is more likely to turn to larceny and bribery as main tools of wealth accumulation. This further weakens the authority of the state, and along with its authority, the monopoly of violence is diffused and diluted. In order to combat this loss of power, one of the ways in which states can "try to reinforce their authority and to become stronger and diminish the role of mafias is to transform their population into a 'nation.'"¹⁰ Three commonly mentioned ways to turn a people into a nation through the state are through the state school system, service in the armed forces, and public ceremonies. All these tools are used to fortify the myth of nation-states, which "are sure to be myths in the sense that they are all social creations, and the states have a central role in their construction."¹¹ These traditions construct the spirit of the nation while at the same time celebrating it as something that exists independently of those structures.

However, state strength is tested not only on an internal level, but also through their position in the competitive environment of the world-system. Strong states work continuously to dominate weak states, whose goal is to advance or maintain their position in the world-system. At the same time, strong states are both in competition with each other but also have the common interest of maintaining the world-system. This interstate system is maintained not only through physical force such as wars and occupations, but also through the economic market. What Wallerstein calls the weakest states, colonies, originated in part through the economic expansion of the world-system. In the process of colonization, colonizing powers not only hoped to assure that they have control over the resources and production processes of their colonies, at

¹⁰ Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*, 54

¹¹ Ibid.

the same time they wanted “also to make sure that no other relatively strong states in the world-system could have access to the resources or the markets of the colony, or at most minimal access.”¹² Strong states are able to use their position in the world hierarchy in order to pressure weak states to keep their borders open to those factors of production that are profitable to strong states, more specifically to firms located in the strong states. At the same time, weak states are not able to demand reciprocity. Similarly to the mode of exchange common in the monarchic system of the past, of plunder and redistribution, weak states are dominated and are offered protection by the exploiting states from other strong states, as long as this exchange is useful to the exploiting state. In this sense, “weak states as states buy the protection of strong states by arranging appropriate flows of capital”¹³, and so the flow of capital and the sovereignty of a state are closely linked, a theme that I will explore in depth in Chapter 2. This economic domination is backed by the possibility of violent intervention by the strong state and the strong state’s alliance with other states, as the sovereignty of the weak state relies on the recognition of other states.

The strength of the nation-state depends on what Karatani calls the mode of exchange C, that of commodity exchange, which produces its own unique form of economic power. “This is not something born of the state; rather, it is something that the state cannot do without.”¹⁴ In order for a state to advance in this world-system, it needs to create itself as a powerful and competitive capitalist nation-state. Any nation-state that hopes to be a strong state among other states needs a growing economy to assert itself in the world economy and resist the exploitation

¹² Ibid, 56.

¹³ Ibid, 55.

¹⁴ Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 83.

of stronger nation-states. In Wallerstein's writings he argues that nations are bound up with capital and the concrete historical form of the world-economy, which, as we have seen, is hierarchically organized into the core and periphery — a system which, through the varying methods of accumulation and exploitation, relies on unequal exchange and domination. According to this view, the formation of the nation-state starts at the core, and through the structure of the world-economy nation-states becomes the dominant form of statehood. The nation-states of the periphery form against one another and in competition with each other, serving the domination of the core nation-states. Ultimately, what Wallerstein illuminates is that “in a sense, every modern nation is a product of colonization: it has always been to some degree colonized or colonizing, and sometimes both at the same time.”¹⁵ The nation-state is thus not only formed by the capital world-system, but also as a form of resistance to its expansion, and is often a response to the existence of a state that lacks communal cohesion. The creation of communal cohesion holds together the other two main aspects of the nation-state, namely the capitalist economy and the governing state. That is, the nationalist sentiment of the people is what allows for both the nation-state and its capitalist economy to function, preventing the growth of any powerful dissent. Karatani likens this to the Borromean rings, “in which the whole collapses if any of the three rings is removed.”¹⁶ The nation-state thus relies heavily on the maintenance of these three aspects, existing only through the continuous work of reaffirming the systems that uphold it.

¹⁵ Wallerstein and Balibar, *Ambiguous Identities*, 89.

¹⁶ Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 220.

Environmentalism in Conflict with the Nation-State

In this way, nation-states generally base themselves on three pillars—that of a shared culture (the idea of a common nation), of mastery over its territory (governed by a state), and of a growing (capitalist) economy, forming a union of the capitalist social formations in the form of the capital-nation-state. These elements, which so fundamentally constitute the nation-state, all affect our understanding of the nature that surrounds us as our environment. The push of a state to prioritize its authority over territory and the endless growth of its economy over countless other factors leave the environment's well-being to be ignored until it affects either the economy or the sovereignty of the state, and any remedy can only be considered if it too prioritizes these factors. Furthermore, a nation-state's need to clearly define and control its territory for the sake of national sovereignty transforms nature into land that is under the control of the state, which is assigned no value outside of the existence of the state, and is made wholly separate from the land that borders it, even though it is materially is no different from the land across the border. These values are continuously protected by the nation-state through the state's insistence on the creation of a shared national culture, which allows for these principles to be adopted by individuals as personal values, so that the state's conception of nature is fiercely upheld by the people, ultimately to the detriment of the environment which humans are also a part of.¹⁷

If the well-being of the environment is so antithetical to the existence of the nation-state and the global system necessary to uphold it, it makes sense that any action which properly prioritizes nature would be a threat to the system of the nation-state, and so the very existence of

¹⁷ The ways in which individuals are brought to uphold the divide between themselves and nature will be further analyzed in Chapter 2.

nation-states is contradictory to the well-being of the environment. With an alternative relationship between humans and the environment, which isn't dependent on the exclusions created by the nation-state, these states would lose their control and mastery over land, and so with that they would also be losing their national sovereignty. As Hamilton argues in *Requiem of a Species*, when conservatives express their distrust of environmental groups and argue that these groups are aiming for the downfall of the nation-state, they are “expressing one of the deepest fears of US conservatives, but their anxiety over national sovereignty was matched by the disquiet they felt at environmentalism’s destabilization of the idea of progress and mastery of nature. For conservatives, these beliefs define modernity itself.”¹⁸ The idea of human mastery over the environment is fundamental to modernity and intertwined with the need for nation-states to map and make use of nature, but reaches its limit when we evaluate the effect that this idea of modernity has had on the well-being of nature, and, through this, on the well-being of most humans as well. The will to master nature, and the view of nature as property, stands in opposition to the ability to effectively respond to climate change. To that extent, climate change is not an apolitical issue. It relates deeply to ideology, and the dominant ideology will impact the choices made in relation to environmental crises. This is something that many climate change deniers realized much sooner than others, and which only serves to fuel their denial. Environmental justice and support for the nation-state cannot coherently coexist, and so many US conservatives are right in their assertion that environmentalism is seeking to undermine the nation-state’s power. Even at the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, the US Administration was clear about its view on environmentalism. “From the outset, environmentalism was seen as a threat to

¹⁸ Clive Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species: Why We Resist the Truth About Climate Change* (London: Earthscan, 2010) 100.

US national sovereignty. Before Rio, a senior Bush Administration official expressed it this way: ‘Americans did not fight and win the wars of the twentieth century to make the world safe for green vegetables.’ This nationalistic framing of the issue has had a powerful and enduring impact in the United States.”¹⁹ By framing environmentalism as an anti-nationalistic movement, it has led the path to denialism that we now see in the US, and in other conservative nation-states as well. However, this framing was not invented by the Bush Administration. Environmentalism will always stand in opposition to nationalism, as the degradation of the environment can no longer be addressed without at the same time addressing how the very existence of nation-states has contributed to the rapid destruction of the environment. A thorough critique of the dominant political structure is therefore central to any discussion on climate change.

The Mapping of Nature

This antagonism between the nation-state and the environment can be observed since the very conception of the nation-state where the state has, as far as it was able to, observed and organized nature for the purpose of economic growth and exerting control over its territory. One of the earliest examples of this taking place within the modern nation-state is the creation of professional forestry in 19th Century Europe. Through forestry having knowledge of a forest and managing its contents became a scientific affair, orienting itself towards economic profit. In order to effectively manage a whole forest, it had to be viewed not as a whole containing a multitude of parts, but as a resource. Everything within the forest which was not a useful resource was ignored, or if it got in the way of maximizing resource extraction, it had to be eradicated. This turned nature into something which did not, in our conception, exist outside of

¹⁹ Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*, 99.

what could be extracted from it for the good of the state, and so “the forest as a habitat disappears and is replaced by the forest as an economic resource to be managed efficiently and profitably.”²⁰ By using nature in this way, not only is its existence outside of how it serves humans ignored, but also the fact that humans have lived within nature in ways that cannot be economically catalogued. This tunnel vision gave humans a view of nature that is abstract and partial, where nearly everything was missing from the state’s frame of reference. There was no flora other than the tree as a commodity, no grasses and flowers or shrubs, and there was no fauna. The forest was not a natural habitat for countless species, it was an area that could be precisely analyzed and profited from. As the life which made up nature was ignored, it ceased to exist from the perspective of at first the governing state, and eventually the nation-state as a whole. Not only were other plants and animals missing from the state’s conception of the forest, but any human interaction with it which did not further the state’s aim was also missing. Forests previously had vast social uses, both physically in terms of gathering and trapping food, but they also lost their “significance for magic, worship, refuge, and so on.”²¹ This further severed the relationship between humans and their environment, which had previously been a source of food, water, and shelter, but is now a foreign material to be governed by the state. The environment is no longer full of life, instead it has become a thing. Other species were no longer appreciated as living beings, but instead were valued by how useful they could be to the state. There was a division between plants that were valued as crops and species which were designated to be weeds, and so the state had an interest in eradicating both weeds and the insects that lived off of

²⁰ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 13.

²¹ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 13.

crops, which were designated as pests. Other animals too were distinguished by whether they increased or reduced profits, either as livestock or game, or instead as predators or varmints. Finally even the trees, which were the focus of the state's tunnel vision, had different valuations depending on how they could be used. No part of nature was allowed to exist simply for the sake of its own existence or the existence of other life which depended on it.

Through the state-focused and utilitarian mapping of nature, the cycle of dependency between human beings and other living beings was negated, so that there was no connection between the forest and the humans that interacted with it. As Foster argues in *Marx's Ecology*, even Marx noted this on his writings on the laws on wood theft, emphasizing that "the law on thefts of wood made it so that people who had real connections to nature, such as foresters (guardians of the forest) were reduced to mere valuers, and whose valuations had nothing to do with their own interests, that of the forest, or the people, instead was directly tied to the interests of the land owners"²² and that "from this point on, throughout his life, Marx was to oppose the parcelization out of portions of the globe to the owners of private property."²³ This notion of land as property serves to further the interests of the nation-state, which sees land in terms of territory and needs its people to defend that interest as their own. This is also clearly seen in the language that is still used to talk about nature as states try to address climate change, and this change in language shows the way that the consciousness which is created through language also orients itself towards creating value. As James C. Scott points out in *Seeing Like a State*, "utilitarian discourse replaces the term "nature" with the term "natural resources," focusing on those aspects

²² John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000) 67.

²³ Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 67.

of nature that can be appropriated for human use.”²⁴ This is not only done on the national scale, where nation-states treat the land and environment as property and territory to be exploited for the gain of the state, but also on an international level.

Nation-states don't only exploit their own territory, but through imperialism also engage in the plundering of land outside their borders.²⁵ The imperialism of nation-states leads to the creation of more nation-states, as with it the spread of capitalism dismantles tribal and agrarian communities, establishing new borders and through the resistance of imperialism often fostering nationalistic cohesion. The imperialism of the nation-state differs from empire in part because of “the assimilation by force of other peoples under the imperialism that arises when a nation-state expands.”²⁶ This assimilation, which was not present in many empires, is strictly necessary for the nation-state, which relies on the imagined community of the nation for its existence. Through this, the renewed direct imperial conquest of the 19th century “was no longer merely the action of the state, or even of the state encouraged by the churches. It had become the passion of the nation, the duty of the citizens.”²⁷ In this way, the existence of a nation-state requires and leads to the global spread of nation-states, and so also to the global hierarchy of nation-states that are both in competition with one another but also rely on the existence of that world-system.

²⁴ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 13.

²⁵ By describing land as territory, and further characterize this as a state's “own” territory, I'm adopting the discourse of the nation-state system for the sake of clarity while recognizing that this discourse already enframes the topic in a problematic way. The language that we use to talk about nature and the relationship of the state to land is further proof of the power of the barriers that exist in trying to form a new relationship between human and non-human nature.

²⁶ Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 225.

²⁷ Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*, 66.

Imperialism and the Nation-State

The legacy of capitalist imperialism informed the creation of nation-states, and now continues to shape our exploitative relationship to nature. The standard of living that many nation-states in the Global North have gotten used to relies on the continued exploitation not only of the labour of workers predominantly in the Global South, but also on the exploitation of resources that are violently and thoughtlessly extracted from nature, made possible by the perception of nature as a resource for economic growth.²⁸ This view of nature also damages the communities that live on and depend on newly exploited land that has been robbed of life, as “the luxury and convenience of the global north and former colonial powers is prioritized above the survival of Indigenous communities.”²⁹ The framework of the nation-state prevents us from drawing lines of solidarity across national boundaries, and divides us both from humans that are not included in the nation-state’s definition of citizen and also from non-human actors. However, “Michael Brzoska points out that, whereas territory used to be the main resource over which states waged war, ‘industrialization meant that raw materials such as coal and oil became *casus belli*’.”³⁰ Strong nation-states needed raw supplies in order to fuel their industrialization and strength as a nation, and were willing to use force in order to obtain these resources. Imperialism

²⁸ Although there are many blanket terms to refer to various nation-states and the relations between them, I will use Global South and Global North to denote the differences between various nation-states. Unlike some older and arguably outdated terms, this term does not include a moral claim about the goal of development, and neither does it affirm the inherent value of capitalist economic growth. The Global North / South do not align with the geographical north / south, rather it emphasizes the importance of geopolitics in the analysis of any nation-states, a goal which aligns itself with this project. It is also the language that is used in a lot of the works that form the basis of this analysis, and that I quote here, and so lends itself to be used in my discussion of these readings as well.

²⁹ Center for Interdisciplinary Environmental Justice, “No Comemos Baterías”, *The Return of Radical Science*, (2019).

³⁰ Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars: Why People Will Be Killed in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2012), 115.

became a tool to uphold the status of a nation-state through the plundering and weakening of other territories, destroying and hoarding environmental resources. In this way, the existence and actions necessary to uphold the nation-state once again came in direct conflict with nature. Not only were the natural resources of other territories seen as a cheap commodity, the environmental destruction left behind by imperial exploitation had only a minuscule effect on the plundering nation, as it happened far from its borders. There will naturally be less resistance against something happening far away than against something happening closer to home, whose impacts are directly felt. Furthermore, with a cheaply available supply of resources through imperialism, imperial nation-states no longer needed to care for the well-being of their own resources, as the depletion of one's "own" environment was easily balanced by the exploitation of other nation-states. This skewed any metabolic relation that humans in imperial nation-states had with their environment, as a balanced or reciprocal relationship to nature did not seem necessary and in fact only hindered the economic and political strength of the nation-state.

The metabolic relation between man and land is defined by Marx as a labour process "between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature"³¹, that is, the balance between what humans take from the land and what they return, such as using the land for agriculture and returning manure as fertilizer. This imbalance in the metabolic relation between humans and nature is also noted on in Foster's *Marx's Economy*, where he writes that due to "British monopoly on Peruvian guano supplies, the United States undertook — first unofficially and then as part of a deliberate state policy — the imperial annexation of any island thought to be rich in

³¹ Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 141.

this natural fertilizer. Under the authority of what became the Guano Islands Act, passed by Congress in 1856, U.S. capitalists seized ninety-four island, rocks, and keys around the globe between 1856 and 1903, sixty-six of which were officially recognized by the Department of State as U.S. appurtenances.”³² The Guano Islands Act shows very clearly how an unbalanced and non-reciprocal relationship with land leads to the necessity to import fertilizers, which in a metabolic environment would be taken and then restored to the earth in a cyclical manner. This need to repair or mend land which was exploited is then intimately connected to the process of nation building and seizing of territory, sanctioned by the state, in order to uphold the nation and to further their exploitative relationship to the land, in order to always maximize its output. “For Marx, the metabolic rift associated at the social level with the antagonistic division between town and country was also evident on a more global level: whole colonies saw their land, resources, *and soil* robbed to support the industrialization of the colonizing countries.”³³ The expansion of the nation-state system wrecks the environment of the periphery in order to sustain the core, and these colonizing states would not be able to uphold their existence as a strong state without this exploitation. Not only do strong states rely on the resources of other nation-states, but also on the very system of domination created by the worldwide structure of the nation-state. Exploiting the natural resources of foreign territories both provides strong states with the materials they need, but it also robs weak nation-states of the possibility to compete with strong states on even grounds, holding the hierarchy firmly in place. In this way, resource exploitation is already advantageous to exploiting states in multiple ways, and the hierarchical world-system upholds both this disparity and the destruction of the environment.

³² Ibid, 151.

³³ Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 164.

Responding to Climate Catastrophe as a Nation-State

Not only has this system of domination changed the relationship between human and non-human nature in the past, and with this affected its current state, but it is also a major issue that needs to be addressed in order to respond to the climate disasters that will only become more frequent in the future. The global structure centered around the capitalist nation-state is also a major obstacle to the current search for solutions or reactions to climate change, which has highlighted just how imbalanced the relations between humans and the environment are. The incapability of the current system in resolving environmental degradation and destruction has been made evident by the urgency of the situation, and can be seen in its proposed solutions, such as in the rush for new green technology. Instead of reimagining the ways in which communities can be organized and how they live with and within nature, nation-states are searching for a new resource that can be used to fuel their constant need for growth, with nation-states using their economic and political power in order to exploit the resources that can only be found on the territory of other nation-states. Nation-states are more willing to sacrifice their people and the land they base themselves in because they are, by virtue of being a nation-state, part of the global hierarchy of nation-states. To adequately profit from this system, nation-states need to either keep their place or rise within this hierarchy. In order to do this many nations will prioritize their place in economic rankings, so “where once nations boasted about their great cultural achievements, their advanced state of knowledge or their military conquests, now the measure of a nation is the level of its gross domestic product or GDP per person, which can be raised by only one means, more growth.”³⁴ It is through this system that many

³⁴ Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*, 33.

nation-states whose land contains an abundance of natural resources are often faced with the choice of either protecting the environment or being a strong participant in the world economy. Even this choice is a false choice, as is evident in the history of what happens to nation-states that refuse to invite foreign states and companies to exploit resources in their territory. This is one of many factors which may lead to a phenomenon commonly referred to as “resource curse”, or the “paradox of plenty”. This theory seeks to explain the observation that nation-states which seem to have an abundance of natural resources often have authoritative regimes, higher levels of corruption, and are likely to have violent conflicts within the state.³⁵ The paradox of plenty has been criticized as well, as studies which claim to observe this paradox have been accused of methodological bias, and the motivations behind claiming that a nation-state which has coveted resources is authoritarian must be critically examined.

Nonetheless, it is still a cause for concern for nation-states that possess resources necessary for the development of new “green” technologies. The relations of unequal exchange and domination that are established between nation-states become all the more acute as the environment collapses globally. Although it is a worldwide problem, some nation-states are obviously far more affected by this change than others — not surprisingly, it is those that are already at or near the bottom of this hierarchy that are once again the most vulnerable to climate change and its consequences. This is a conflict that will only become more acute in the future, as we run out of resources and as the climate of many previously habitable regions become too harsh for human life. The effects of climate change are already being felt in many regions of the world, leading to droughts and famines, floods and extreme weather events. As people are

³⁵ Michael L. Ross, “What Have We Learned about the Resource Curse.” *Annual Review of Political Science*, (2015).

pushed off the land they've build their communities on, other regions have to absorb them, a process made much more complicated by the existence of nation-states, which prioritize protecting territory and a common culture over the safety of those that are labeled as outsiders. As large parts of the world's population suffer from the effects of climate change, there is a push for change, and yet those states that are able to continue business as usual for now have little reason to change their ways.

Lifeboat ethics, a term coined by Garrett Hardin in 1974, seeks to justify the callous attitude of strong states towards weak states in times of crises. Lifeboat ethic is used as a metaphor for the resources of our world, where rich nation-states are on the lifeboat, while poor nation-states are swimming around it. Hardin argues that like a lifeboat, "a nation's land has a limited capacity to support a population"³⁶, and that letting those in need onto the metaphorical lifeboat would jeopardize the safety of those on board. This argument fundamentally lacks any understanding of the relations between nation-states, the historical reasons as to why some nations are wealthier than others, and of the unequal distribution and hoarding of resources. This all benefits the strong nation-state, which relies on the exclusion of others and a hierarchical system which discourages solidarity outside the boundary of the nation-state. The structure of the nation-state also makes it harder to assign responsibility, as the state acts on behalf of a heterogenous group instead of as an individual. Even in the face of the urgent crisis that is climate change, nation-states are taking on a policy of business as usual for as long as they can, viewing this as an optimal non-solution. Welzer argues that this is a neat solution for many nation-states, which are not immediately threatened by climate change, because it raises no

³⁶ Garrett Hardin, "Lifeboat Ethics" *The Hastings Center Report*, (1975).

obvious ethical problems. Since the nation-state is a player that acts on behalf of others and not as an individual, it avoids the backlash that individual actors would face, since “in relations between states such categories as egoism, inconsiderateness or indolence are irrelevant. Any state can play dirty, but that does not change by one iota its bargaining power in the international arena.”³⁷ This disconnect between politics and climate actions both manages to foster a sense of powerlessness among individuals and also allows for nation-states to absolve themselves of responsibility through political jargon and loopholes.

Not only do strong states profit from the uneven flow of capital between strong and weaker nation-states, they also depend on the loose environmental regulations of other states in order to extract resources in ways that would be protested if done to their own land. This allows for nations to chastise others for not taking enough action against climate change while in practice relying on global passivity when it comes to climate regulations, as to be able to uphold their position in the global hierarchy of states. At the same time, nation-states can deny their own faults in their response or lack of response to this crisis, insisting that they shouldn't have to act if others are not giving up the same amount of power for the sake of the global future. Norgaard writes, in her book *Living in Denial*, about an experience she had when the topic of climate change came up during a conversation she had in Norway. When asked on his opinion on climate change and its causes, her interlocutor pointed out how reluctant the United States has been in decreasing their carbon emissions. Norgaard hypothesises that “mentioning the U.S. role in the matter served to manage emotions of powerlessness and guilt by giving the speaker something

³⁷ Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars*, 104.

“clever” to say and someone to blame.”³⁸ While shifting the blame to the US is a common tactic, as Norgaard details in her work, Norway has also dropped its national emission targets and increased oil development. These same nation-states then scapegoat the loose environmental regulations of other nation-states that they are using in their favour in order to show why it should be the responsibility of other nation-states to act on climate change. This shifting of the blame delays action, as each nation-state is able to blame something over which they have no apparent control over, whose existence they however profit from. This is laid out in Clive Hamilton’s analysis of Norgaard’s study on climate change denial in Norway. Norway has much more of a cultural affinity for their environment, and yet climate denial or climate passivity is extremely common there too. What often ends up being the case is that they are able to see themselves as innocent in regards to environmental destruction, as they point out the scale of the damage that other nation-states are perpetuating. Hamilton writes in Norgaard’s study that “as citizens of a small country, many of her Norwegian subjects were quick to blame ‘Amerika’ and mentioned the Bush Administration’s repudiation of the Kyoto Protocol. When they were reminded that Norway is the world’s second-largest exporter of oil, attention shifted to the fact that Norway is not seen as important geopolitically.”³⁹ This divide between nation-states and geopolitics and the environment paralyzes any possibility of responding to such a large problem and of acting on a global scale. It is easy to remain passive, or to actively encourage passivity, within the structure of the nation-state as one state is able to deny having any control over what the other does, and so uses the other state’s actions in order to justify their own lack of response

³⁸ Kari Marie Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 166.

³⁹ Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*, 126/7.

to a problem that would require global participation. In a similar vein, the structure of the nation-state has also ensured that power can often be shielded from democratic forces, by creating spaces where it is even harder to hold anyone accountable.

Conclusion

The relatively new formation of the nation-state that was able to manifest as a result of the structures set up by absolute monarchies have transformed the way nature is thought of and represented in the capitalist nation-state global framework. Through the use of mapping, for example in forestry, non-human nature is abstracted and seen as a resource. As nation-states struggle to meet their needs with the resources found within their boundaries, they use the power they have through the framework of the nation-states system in order to exploit the resources of other regions as well, in the process leading to the spread of this framework. In this way, the system is upheld by strong states to enable them to plunder and exploit nature on a global scale. This framework continues to impact the environment and our relationship to it, limiting our ability to respond to environmental issues effectively.

Chapter 2: The Nation-State and Private Industries

In this chapter I will explore the way the nation-state and private industries, in particular the resource extraction industry, are connected, and how these private industries rely on the power of nation-states. By analyzing capitalism's role in the creation of frontiers of exploitation, aided by imperialism, I will show that capitalism's mode of operation is in conflict with the environment. I will focus on two resource extraction industries, coal in Appalachia and oil in Louisiana, to emphasize the relation of these industries to politics, and how there is a systematic lack of oversight and accountability. The impact of the oil industry in Louisiana points us towards the use of ideology in advancing capitalism and aiding the growth of resource extraction industries, which makes Balibar's claim that "Any group who sees advantage in using the state's legal powers to advance its interests against groups outside the state or in any subregion of the state has an interest in promoting nationalist sentiment as a legitimization of its claims"⁴⁰ central to this chapter. I will use Moore in order to explore the theory on how capitalism has appropriated tools such as mapping in order to spread, and I will also show that the government often tries but ultimately fails to regulate capitalism's impact on the environment, especially through EPA regulations. Heidegger's theory of *technik* and example of the forester will show how an employee of the state is used to do capitalism's bidding, leading to the conclusion that capitalist industries rely on the nation-state that is unable to regulate those industries, and that the combination of the nation-state and of capitalist industries create and maintain a division between human and non-human nature.

⁴⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein and Étienne Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991) 82.

Throughout this chapter I will rely on Moore's understanding of the term 'appropriation' in order to connect capitalism to the nation-state. Moore's using of appropriation casts a difference between that and exploitation, where exploitation relies on the existence of appropriation, which is defined as the "extra-economic processes that identify, secure, and channel unpaid work outside the commodity system into the circuit of capital"⁴¹. The core argument is that the exploitation of labour-power relies on the appropriation of nature and colonies, and this dual source of resources is also what connects the appropriation that fuels capitalism to the history of nation-states. The exploitation that fuels capitalism relies on the colonization that is so central to the spread of the nation-state, as explained in Chapter 1, and on the resources and labor that has been appropriated (rather than exploited) from colonies and nature. Moore states in *Capitalism in the Web of Life* that "By itself, coal is only a *potential* actant; bundled with the relations of class, empire, and appropriation in the nineteenth century, however, coal becomes something quite different. It becomes a way of naming a mass commodity whose presence was felt in every strategic relation of nineteenth-century capitalism."

⁴² Although coal defined so much global development in both the 19th and 20th century, by itself it is simply an object hidden under the earth. However, as I will show in this chapter, through the combined structures of the nation-state and resource extraction industries, coal becomes a central force within capitalism, and signifies the way that the nation-state and capitalism have shaped the world's relationship to nature.

⁴¹ Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London and New York: Verson, 2015), 17.

⁴² Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 196.

In order to explore the interdependence of these systems and the effect they've had on the environment, I'd like to return briefly to Wallerstein's *World-Systems Analysis*, where he highlights the relationship of private industries to the sovereign state within a capitalist world-economy. Industries rely on the state through the rules created by the state which affect the arenas that are of direct interest to them. States can intervene in the private sector in a variety of ways, both to the benefit and detriment of the industries that are affected by these rules. There are various ways in which states are able to influence the private sector:

“(1) States set the rules on whether and under what conditions commodities, capital, and labor may cross their borders. (2) They create the rules concerning property rights within their states. (3) They set rules concerning employment and the compensation of employees. (4) They decide which costs firms must internalize. (5) They decide what kinds of economic processes may be monopolized, and to what degree. (6) They tax. (7) Finally, when firms based within their boundaries may be affected, they can use their power externally to affect the decisions of other states.”⁴³

In particular, I'd like to focus on the role that resource extraction industries play within the nation-state world-system, and the phenomenon that nation-states both profit from resource extraction industries but are also unable to regulate the companies within these industries. States can clearly have an immense effect on the capitalist markets that take place both within and

⁴³ Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 46.

outside of their boundaries, and yet this power falls short when it comes to the protection of both human and non-human natures.

One of the central roles of the state in capitalist industries concerns the question of the costs and burdens that an industry must internalize. “The least expensive way for a producer to deal with waste is to cast it aside, outside its property. The least expensive way to deal with transformation of the ecology is to pretend it isn’t happening.”⁴⁴ An industry is able to externalize costs through the state, which can pay for the negative effects an industry has on its surroundings or provide incentives such as physical infrastructure. Both of these actions help an industry out financially and connect its existence to the support of the state. One of the most obvious externalizations of cost right now is the damage that many industries inflict on the environment, both in their appropriation of resources and in their contribution to the destruction of nature. One way in which this immense cost is externalized is by placing the damage of an industry outside of the national boundaries under whose jurisdiction the industry falls. This is clearly observed in many resource extraction firms which supply and operate out of the global north while plundering the global south, and so escape accountability. As these industries and their commodities are indispensable for the nation-states in the global north, the states uses their strength and position in the world-system in order to allow for the continued exploitation and appropriation of natural resources outside their boundaries. “The fundamental role of the state as an institution in the capitalist world-economy is to augment the advantage of some against others in the market [...] the state can act not only within its jurisdiction but beyond it. This may be licit (the rules concerning transit over boundaries) or illicit (interference in the internal affairs of

⁴⁴ Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*, 48.

another state).”⁴⁵ As we’ve seen in chapter 1, strong states can use their strength in order to influence the action of weak states, not only to further their national project, but also to uphold the capitalist system that is central to their continued existence. This issue of cost externalization is also highlighted in Hochschild’s *Strangers in Their Own Land*, where she explores the oil industry in and around Louisiana. Through this industry, Louisiana was promised an economic boom, which it hasn’t yet seen. Instead, the state often takes up the costs of the industry. “Sasol needed water for industrial purposes and wanted Westlake to dig a new well. But it would only pay 25 percent of the cost with the state of Louisiana paying the other 75 percent.”⁴⁶ It is not just the destruction of natural resources that costs the state and the people living in Louisiana, but also the maintenance of the infrastructure necessary for oil and gas extraction. In return for a promise of jobs and economic prosperity, the oil industry is given almost ideal working conditions. However, the economic growth of the industry often does not end up benefiting the greater public, and local employees can be at a disadvantage to trained workers that are brought in by the company. In the end, capitalism creates a new frontier, exploiting and appropriating as much as it can while investing or returning as little as possible. When this frontier is eventually sucked dry, capitalism moves on to the next one, with no regard for the reconstruction of the environment and the community that it has destroyed.

In order for this kind of capitalist industry to thrive, it needs a steady supply of (cheap) labor, a demand which is central to capitalism. This supply of cheap labor is another important way in which the state can uphold private industries, by prioritizing economic growth over

⁴⁵ Wallerstein and Balibar, *Ambiguous Identities*, 122.

⁴⁶ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York and London: The New Press, 2016), 95.

sustainability, both in terms of the use of labour and of natural resources. Although resource extraction industries pillage the areas they find to be profitable, and although many of these industries directly affect the health of people living in that area and creating this profit, “Capital is simply indifferent even if those workers are dying as long as “the *race of laborers*” does not die out.”⁴⁷ Capital does not need its resources, whether this resource is a labor force or raw materials, to be sustainable as long as it is always in some form available, and just as importantly, is available cheaply. Capitalism needs the increased production of capital to be fast and cheap in order to sustain itself, and for this to work it needs both exploited and appropriated labor to be widely available. Marx himself explored the theme of the process of capitalism and its relation to ecology, arguing that the two are inherently in direct conflict with each other. The very theme of modernity and progress are in fact contradictory to the well-being of the earth, as “all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress toward ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility”⁴⁸. Part of the project of capitalism (and of nation-states) is to extract the most profit from any resource, often prioritizing short term gain over long term stability. The profit motive is most obvious to me in the resource extraction industry, whose very existence relies on a denial of the damage that it causes to both the environment and to the labour force that is involved in the continued extraction. This denial of the damage that is done can be seen not only in its exploitation of soil, but also in its exploitation of labour and labourers.

⁴⁷ Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), 41.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), Vol. I, 637/8.

The Appropriation of Natural Resources

Capitalism exploits labor-power, this is a central feature of the system, however this exploitation also depends on the process of appropriation of the unpaid labor done by women, nature, and colonies. As Moore makes clear in *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, “the value (or cheapness) of labor-power is directly bound up with the unpaid work of humans and the rest of nature. The connection between human labor-power and extra-human work is not distant but intimate, dialectical, immediate.”⁴⁹ Capitalism depends on the exploitation and extraction of resources from nature, and so has as its very basis a nonreciprocal relationship to the environment. Through this manifold process of exploitation and appropriation of both human and non-human labor, “Capitalism’s binary code works, moreover, not just as description but as a normative program for ordering — and cheapening — humans and the rest of nature.”⁵⁰ Capitalism’s ability to cheapen human and non-human life depends on the work of colonization, where, as has been laid out in the previous chapter, colonizing empires fostered the principles of expansion and accumulation. The role of European colonial expansion in spreading capitalism’s relationship to the environment is twofold — on the one hand it was this “global expropriation that provided the primary accumulation for the genesis of industrial capital”⁵¹, while at the same time its spread destroyed previously existing communal systems of property. The spread of capitalism is antithetical to any communal system of property as it relies on the accumulation of capital, and this accumulation is “the defining characteristic and *raison d’être* of this system”⁵²

⁴⁹ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 230.

⁵⁰ Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 208.

⁵¹ Foster, *Marx’s Ecology*, 173.

⁵² Balibar and Wallerstein, *Ambiguous Identities*, 107.

Through the global expropriation and privatization driven by capital, anything that could have any value in a capitalist system is rendered into an object of exploitation and appropriation, every natural resource needs to be accumulated and made profitable, and every resource needs to be extracted to its maximum profitability. As capitalism moves across the globe in its constant need for growth, it creates new frontiers of exploitation. As Moore explains, “That frontier is the boundary between commodified and non commodified life, and capital moves across that boundary through the mapping and quantifying technics, of abstract social nature.”⁵³ As capital seeks out more resources to commodify, it often uses the nation-state in order to map out land, turning it from an expanse of nature to a resource laden area. In order to accumulate capital, nature needs to be turned into a commodity that can be monetized, and this work is often done through imperial expansion, which as it expands transforms land into territory, into a commodity. This intertwined process shows clearly “the centrality of the frontier and imperialism in capital accumulation”⁵⁴, as capital depends on the act of imperial expansion and conquest of new frontiers in order to grow.

Resource Extraction Industries at the Frontiers

I’d like to explore the expansion and creation of frontiers through two related industries; coal in Appalachia and oil in Louisiana. These industries need to guarantee the collaboration of communities in the destruction of their own surroundings, and do this by using the divide and alienation of man to nature and of man to himself to the industries’ advantage, turning nature into an object that exists to be mastered and exploited in the same way that workers are mastered,

⁵³ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 222.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 73.

exploited, and ultimately abandoned by the industries that rely on their labour. The coal industry in Appalachia shows the interdependence of the industry with the project of nation-state building and colonization, while the case of oil in Louisiana highlights the ways in which this powerful industry has been supported by the state and has at the same time evaded regulation. Moore writes “Coal, as we have seen, was epoch-making because it facilitated capitalization *and* appropriation in the long nineteenth century.”⁵⁵ Through industrial capitalism coal became central to “the opening of vast new frontiers for appropriation”⁵⁶, and while coal enabled the emergence of British hegemony, American hegemony grew “through oil frontiers and the industrialization of agriculture it enabled”.⁵⁷ Although these industries cost the state a lot, they are also central to upholding the nation-state’s hegemony, thus intertwining the existence of both. One of the ways in which a raw material becomes so fundamental to the creation of new frontiers is by managing natural resources through institutions of private property. When nature becomes a mere money making tool for an industry and for a nation as a whole, personal connections to it are severed, and with it a large incentive for individuals to protect nature and their own relationship to it. Instead, it becomes something to exploit, and with that, humans, who are tied to nature, exploit both themselves and their environment, valuing contributions to economic growth at a higher place than the wellbeing of the environment and the health of communities.

The coal industry’s effect on Appalachia is heavily studied in Gaventa’s *Power and Powerlessness*, and he focuses his study on the Cumberland Gap, in which an economic boom

⁵⁵ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 148.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

created the mining centre of Middlesboro. Middlesboro was funded by the American Association, Ltd., of London, and was boosted by over \$20'000'000 of British capital under the leadership of Alexander Arthur. His secretary described this process as being “for the purpose of further colonization”⁵⁸, however Gaventa argues that what he calls the Appalachia’s cultural domination “should be seen not as a function of ‘colonization’ but as the class hegemony and legitimation of peripheral region within an advanced capitalist nation”⁵⁹. The creation of the Appalachian frontier is not just a continuation of the project of colonization, it is further used in order to legitimize class division and the existence of a core and a periphery within a single nation-state. The mining town of Middlesboro is not just evidence of the relationship between the colonizing nation and its colony, but has evolved to also be evidence of the capitalist class which owns the extractive industry and the working class which is needed in order to create economic growth through resource extraction. Through the accumulation of land as property under capitalism, industries are able to control much of the areas they wish to exploit, with little room for accountability. This can be seen in the disproportionate hoarding of land in areas with abundant natural resource, such as in Central Appalachia, as “While in the rest of the county many of the small businesses and 89 per cent of the land were locally owned and widely distributed, in the Valley roughly 85 per cent of the land and most of the coal wealth continued to be owned by the single absentee owner.”⁶⁰ As the industry owns the land that it is appropriating, it has a much larger say over the way it treats the resources on and under that land, and at the same time establishes a relation of dependency with the community that lives on this

⁵⁸ John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 47.

⁵⁹ Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 43.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 128.

land. Through land ownership, the coal industry is able to dictate what happens to and is done on that land, whether that be mining and corporate-owned housing. Workers then depend on this private industry not only for their jobs, but also for their general well-being, and are at the mercy of these companies in terms of the health of the environment and the community in general. Although land is then largely controlled by the private sector, the state plays its role in Appalachia as well.

The coal industry, a private industry, is closely tied to the politics of Appalachia, and of the United States in general. It lays bare the discrepancy between the power of regulation that the state claims to have and the actual freedom to destroy the environment that private industries are given. Between 1985 and 2001, the EPA estimated that more than 700 miles of Appalachian streams were buried by valley fills. The EPA further asserted that if “this practice continues at the current rate, over 1.4 million acres of land will be lost by the end of the decade.”⁶¹ The industry which is destroying the Appalachian region is upheld through legislation, or the lack thereof. In 2008, landmark bills were introduced in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee to regulate the practice of mountaintop removal. Kentucky’s Stream Saver bill, which would have banned the dumping of overburden into streams, had been on hold for three years, held back by the House Natural Resources Committee. When it was finally introduced to a different committee it failed 13-12, with three lawmakers abstaining. In West Virginia a bill that would end valley fills found a majority of witnesses testifying in favor of the bill, and yet it was voted out of committee. Often times, lawmakers that choose to ignore these issues argue that if the people affected by coal mining wanted a bill to be passed, there would be a louder outcry for

⁶¹ Silas House and Jason Howard, *Something's Rising: Appalachians Fighting Mountaintop Removal* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 2.

this. With an industry as successful and large, and ultimately powerful, as the coal industry, individuals and even entire institutions become powerless and unable to regulate it. This resource extraction industry fuels so much of the growth of powerful nation-states and of capital as a whole that there is a very large and strong interest in protecting the profits made from it, not to mention that it lies at the heart of capitalist industries to be pushing for ceaseless and uninhibited growth, at any cost that doesn't have to be paid by the industry itself.

This lack of accountability and oversight seems to be an issue not only with the coal industry of Appalachia, but is also rampant in the oil industry of Louisiana. The antagonistic relationship between resource extraction and environmental and human health could not be more evident, and inspectors in Louisiana criticized the state's lack of overview in the oil industry. When asked to inspect the state of oil extraction, "The inspector general concluded that he was "unable to fully assure the public that Louisiana was operating programs in a way that effectively protects human health and the environment." Why such low marks? Three reasons, the inspector general concluded: natural disasters, low funds, and 'a culture in which the state agency is expected to protect industry.'"⁶² Not only does the state protect the industry when it is not in compliance with regulations, but these regulations themselves are often so loose that even if a company is fully complying with them, the health risks may still be gigantic. For example, Sasol, a petrochemical giant based in South Africa, was granted permission by the state of Louisiana to emit an estimated 10,000,000 tons of new greenhouse gases every year, without proposing any form of carbon capture or other ways to mitigate the consequences of this damage to the

⁶² Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 109.

environment, and one of their plants has been approved despite expecting to emit 85 times Louisiana's threshold rate of benzene each year.⁶³

The state which is responsible for the well-being of its citizens instead was expected and pressured to prioritize the growth of the industry, much to dismay of some local communities. And yet many of these local communities find it difficult to stand up to these practices, both in Louisiana and in Appalachia, as "many Appalachians find it difficult to oppose this practice because of the coal industry's long history of convincing people that to protest any form of mining is to oppose an industry that has long been a major supplier of jobs within the region."⁶⁴ However even when there is protest, these outcries are often ignored and downplayed, even or maybe especially by the local media, and coal mining communities are often founded and organized with the very intent of minimizing resistance in the first place. As resource extraction industries such as coal and oil grow and acquire both capital and power, they are able to exert more and more influence, not only on legislative politics, but on individuals as well. As Hochschild shows in *Strangers in Their Own Land*, these industries are able to convince even those that are directly impacted by their negative effects to under and accommodate "the downside of loose regulations out of a loyalty to free enterprise", and that it was necessary to endure toxic spills and the destruction of one's habitat "for a higher good, such as jobs in oil".⁶⁵ It is not just the power of capital that facilitates this, but the use of ideology as well.

⁶³ Ibid, 91.

⁶⁴ House and Howard, *Something's Rising*, 12.

⁶⁵ Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 155.

Ideology and Resource Extraction Industries

In order to be able to exploit both labor and resources, a capitalist ideology had to be constructed and pushed onto the labour that facilitates this extraction, and I want to specifically look at the coal miners of Middlesboro. This ideology included, as Gaventa points out in his study of the Cumberland Gap, the notion of progress. The notion of progress, “proclaimed the virtues of ‘civilization’, and would not pause to ask about the virtues of the culture there before.”

⁶⁶ Neither the state of the Appalachian environment nor the values of Appalachian workers mattered to the growing coal industry, whose own progress and growth demanded the cooperation of both human and non-human labor towards what was deemed to be a common goal — progress. This had a drastic effect on the relationship of humans to nature, as while “the culture of the mountaineer has been founded and shaped by its relationship to nature — its isolation, its struggle for survival, its harmony with streams and mountains — this new civilization would not be so bound; indeed, it would conquer”⁶⁷. As capitalism worked to appropriate nature, capitalists used everything at their disposal to assert their dominance over not just the working class, but human and non-human nature as a whole. This assertion of power is fundamental to the expansion of capitalism, which controls and subjugates its environment in the striving for constant growth and accumulation. “Early capitalism’s *technics* — its crystallization of tools and power, knowledge and production — were *specifically organized* to treat the appropriation of global space as the basis for the accumulation of wealth in its specifically modern form: capital.”⁶⁸ It was not only the expansionism of empire and nation-states that

⁶⁶ Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 61.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 62.

⁶⁸ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 190.

mapped space in order to conquer it, capitalism itself also maps and defines space in order to commodify it and extract evermore capital. As capitalism and empire advance hand in hand, creating the modern day nation-state structure of the world, they take everything in their path and transform it into abstraction. Land becomes territory, nature becomes a resource. As this expansion transforms non-human nature into an object of conquest and profit, human nature is in danger too. As Moore argues, “It was a small step to move from considering extra-human natures, local property, or global space, in terms of equivalents and interchangeability, to considering human natures in the same fashion.”⁶⁹ As empire advances, both the land and people of its colonies are used to sustain it. As capital advances, it exploits and appropriates human and non-human resources.

Engels himself believed that an “immediate consequence of private property was the split of production into two opposing sides — the natural and the human sides, the soil which without fertilization by man is dead and sterile, and human activity, whose first condition is that very soil.”⁷⁰ Capitalism disrupts the metabolic relationship between human and non-human activities, to the point where the human side is seen as separate from the natural side. By seeking to master nature capitalism denies its dependence on nature, pretending that natural activities can be controlled and manipulated for the sake of acquiring capital, and denying that humans and non-humans are interdependent forces. Capitalism aims to manipulate the environment and transform it into a resource, which can be seen on very basic levels in the forestry and agriculture industries, and yet capitalism’s mode of operation is fundamentally opposed to the nature that these sectors rely on. “The way that the cultivation of particular crops depends on fluctuations in

⁶⁹ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 213.

⁷⁰ Foster, *Marx’s Ecology*, 106.

market prices and the constant changes in cultivation with these price fluctuations — the entire spirit of capitalist production, which is oriented towards the most immediate monetary profits — stands in contradiction to agriculture, which has to concern itself with the whole gamut of permanent conditions of life required by the chain of human generations.”⁷¹ Capitalism may seek to fulfill needs that have to be addressed in a long-term manner, but as a system it is far more disposed toward short-term profit driven solutions than toward sustainable options.

Capitalism uses the tools of the state, such as mapping or the spread of technique, in order to transform the world into a resource, into commodities that are simply waiting to be monetized by capitalism. Martin Heidegger writes about this process in his essay *Technique and the Turn*, where he describes “modern technique as the unconcealing that summons”⁷² objects into *Bestand*, a standing-reserve. As modern technique summons objects to be at its disposal, these objects become summonable for the moment in which they can be put to use, and when they are not being used they stand in waiting for the possibility of being summoned. They no longer stand or exist in their own right. Entire forests are turned into Bestand when the forester maps and names the trees in the forest, transforming them into objects that are waiting to be turned into lumber, while the rest of the forest is ignored and erased. The forester first appeared in my Chapter 1 as an employee of the state, where he transformed land into territory to be used for the growth of the state. Now, the employee of the state is used by capital for its own growth. As Heidegger notes, “The forest-warden who measures the felled wood in the forest, and by all semblance treads the same forest-paths in the same way as his grandfather, is today ordered

⁷¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), Vol. 3, 754.

⁷² Martin Heidegger, “The Turn”, Lecture, *Glance into What Is*, Bremen, December 1, 1949.

(*bestellt*) by the lumber-industry, whether he knows it or not.”⁷³ As the forester transforms nature into Bestand, he himself is an object of Bestand for the industry. Thus, as capital uses the tools of the state, the entire world is turned into Bestand, waiting to be used in order to further economic growth and with no function outside of this purpose. Nonetheless, humans mostly don’t see themselves as being an object in the way that nature has become an object, as capitalism and the destruction of communal systems of property further the split between human and non-human nature.

As we’ve been able to see, resource extraction industries often use the legal powers of the state for their own benefit, and with that their interests become tied to the interests of the state. In order to uphold this hegemony, these industries often participate in the promotion of nationalist sentiment, and the effects of this can be seen most clearly on those that are most affected by the industries’ damage. The excitement around a resource extraction industry can go hand in hand with nationalist sentiment, and Hochschild describes in her book, where she writes that it was believed that “Fracking could strengthen American foreign policy. Instead of importing oil from unstable or authoritarian countries like Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan, the United States could extract natural gas from its own soil. It could even *export* natural gas through a widened Panama Canal to energy-hungry Japan, or to a Russia-dependent Ukraine.”⁷⁴ The dangers of fracking, or coal mining, are underplayed or ignored and instead the focus is on how the practice is not only profitable for the private sector, but can strengthen the nation-state. Hochschild’s quote also shows the way this private industry relies on the global imbalance between nation-states, where for example the dependence of Ukraine on Russia makes it vulnerable and desperate for US oil,

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 90.

opening a market. As Balibar and Wallerstein argue in *Ambiguous Identities*, “the capitalist economy depends on *political* struggles within the national and transnational space”⁷⁵. However, this national profit also needs to be tied to the interest of the individual worker. This is often done through the promotion of the American Dream, where the success of an individual is tied to the nation-state. Hochschild interviews Madonna Massey, the wife of a pastor who uses her faith in order to cope with the environment crumbling around her. Although she and her community are strongly affected by the oil industry, she sees a strong opposition around those advocating for the environment and those advocating for her country. “‘Environmentalists want to stop the American Dream to protect the endangered toad,’ she says, ‘but if I had to choose between the American Dream and a toad, hey, I’ll take the American Dream.’”⁷⁶ The question of environmental destruction is laid out as if it were only for the benefit of non-human nature, one that is far removed from her, and that stands in opposition to her idea of progress. Her patriotism and belief that her country will lead her to the path of success stand in opposition to any concern about the environment or the practices of the oil industry, and so resource extraction industries are able to use this nationalist sentiment to their advantage. Another tool of the state that capitalism uses is that of inspiring sacrifice for a greater good. In order to inspire someone to sacrifice themselves, you need them to see themselves as part of a greater community, which is very much part of the nation-state project. The idea of sacrificing your immediate interests for those of the state is a cultural fix which serves to “normalize otherwise unacceptable appropriations of global natures, human and extra-human.”⁷⁷ Through the promotion of a strong

⁷⁵ Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, 11

⁷⁶ Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 122.

⁷⁷ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 199.

nationalist sentiment, citizens are successfully convinced to live near toxic waste lands or to do work that destroys the environment that sustains them, ultimately benefiting both the nation-state and the resource extraction industries that are able to use its tools.

Conclusion

Capitalism relies on the spread of and the tools of the nation-state in order to sustain its need for endless growth, which ultimately shows itself in the act of promoting nationalist sentiment by resource extraction industries, who use these tools to commodify resources and pacify any potential resistance. Although the nation-state tries to regulate the impact of these industries on the environment, it also benefits from them and is most often unable or unwilling to regulate them. Instead, capital appropriates the work that the nation-state does in frontier building and mapping of territory for its own sake, using the authority of the state to legitimate its own actions. The expansion of imperialism and the creation of new frontiers by capitalism are two processes that go hand in hand, creating divisions between human and non-human nature that ravage the health of environments and communities alike, and that are ultimately upheld by individuals through the use of cultural fixes such as the instillment of nationalist sentiment. The combined forces of the nation-state and of the private industries discussed in this chapter are used to dissuade any possible modes of resistance or alternative visions of humans and their place in nature, and yet this project is never fully successful, as we will see in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Class Struggle and the Environment

As the previous chapters seek to explain, the stark division between humans and the rest of nature that is in part drawn by the nation-state is further spread through capitalism. The nation-state reimagines nature as a resource and land as territory, severing the relationship between humans and the rest of nature and creating a relationship of domination. Capitalism in turn relies on the constant advancement of resource frontiers, which exploit and appropriate nature and ravage the environment for the sake of economic growth. This chapter is going to look at whether the response to capitalism through class struggle must account for the environment and our relationship with it in order to be successful. In order to reach the conclusion that class struggle must come to terms with the issue of the relations between humans and nature, I analyze two ways in which nature and class struggle intersect. Through this and the theory that has been laid out in this paper I am led to the necessity of a specifically anti-nationalist internationalist form of class politics, in which the notion of class is expanded to include non-human nature as well. Finally, I return to Appalachia in order to ground the question of how to mend our relationship to nature. There are many responses to the global framework that we inhabit, and many proposed solutions, both theoretical and practical, to the question of humans and nature. The movements that I draw inspiration from are mostly indigenous anti-colonial forms of resistance and forms of living. However, in this chapter I am going to focus on the intersection of class politics and human and environmental healing, and on the centrality of nature in class war. At the risk of essentializing this issue and relying too much on human systems of understanding, “the struggle over the relation between humans and the rest of

nature is necessarily a class struggle. (But not *just* a class struggle.)”⁷⁸ It is a class struggle in at least two distinct ways. First, the environmental effects that are provoked by our relationship to the rest of nature disproportionately affect those living in poverty. Secondly, when it is useful for the accumulation of capital, the line between humans and nature is redrawn, for example in order to justify conquest and colonialism. Before I move to more deeply analyze the former instance, I’d like to explain what I mean by the latter.

The class war within the struggle over the relation between humans and the rest of nature is evident in the history of conquest and colonization, as we’ve seen in the previous chapters, and is especially clear within the attempts at justifying colonial enterprises and the suffering and exploitation that was necessary for its success. The hard boundary that has been set between humans and nature becomes especially dangerous when some humans are pushed further towards nature and dehumanized in order to justify their exploitation of appropriation. Patel and Moore write that “Like *savage*, to which it is kin, the term *monster* ought to trigger alarm for its association with beings that cross the boundary between humans and nonhuman animals.”⁷⁹ That boundary is so seditious partly because it can be manipulated, and because due to the existence of this split humans can be pushed across it. This ability to dehumanize people weakens the class struggle, which currently is restricted to the human realm. In order to protect what is currently viewed as nature or humans whose status has been equated to that of nature it is necessary to expand our idea of class to one that includes non-human nature and allows for a solidarity that dissolves that boundary. This hard but shifting boundary between human and non-human nature

⁷⁸ Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 205.

⁷⁹ Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 183.

is part of a complex struggle to overcode forms of life as is most suitable to the interests of nation-state expansion and capitalism, and so is an issue that is too large for me to address in this paper. However, the effects of this practice are central to the intersection of our understanding of non-human nature and class struggle. Kyle Whyte describes this practice as vicious sedimentation, and defines it as the constant ascriptions of settler ecologies onto Indigenous ecologies fortify settler ignorance against Indigenous peoples over time. In historic accounts of fur traders, clergy, and settlers, they certainly attempted to enclose regions such as Anishinaabewaki into settler concepts of nationhood, savage places, and so on. But in reading those accounts, the colonists nonetheless traveled through these regions and recognized the different Indigenous ecologies operative within those places”⁸⁰. The severed relations between humans and the nature that surrounds us are not inherent, they are deliberately manipulated to suit certain interests. Naomi Klein leans on Said’s study of ‘othering’ in order to connect anti-colonial class struggles with the climate movement, writing that “once the other has been firmly established, the ground is softened for any transgression: violent expulsion, land theft, occupation, invasion. Because the whole point of othering is that the other doesn’t have the same rights, the same humanity, as those making the distinction. What does this have to do with climate change? Perhaps everything.”⁸¹ She argues that much of the reckless destruction of nature that we have seen in the past would not have been possible without an othering of those that were directly affected by it, a core theme of many theories that combine ecological violence with violence against women, or against poor people, or against people of color. We have a

⁸⁰ Kyle Whyte, “Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice”, *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 9 (2018), 138.

⁸¹ Naomi Klein, “Let Them Drown.” *London Review of Books*, June 1, 2016.

deeply imbalanced relationship to nature, one that creates an other that cannot be related to, and it becomes a class struggle in the moment we also push some classes of people over the boundary that we've created.

The struggle over the relation between humans and the rest of nature is even more clearly exposed as a class struggle when we look at how the working class is disproportionately affected by its consequences. As industries and states exploit and destroy the environment for the sake of growth, the communities that live in those lands must deal with the consequences, and this burden is disproportionately laid on the working class. Those that live and work at the frontiers of resource extraction, where the severed relationship between humans and nature is directly exploited for gain, suffer from the aftermath. As has been laid out in the previous chapter, regions of frontiers are usually also regions of poverty, as the industry can exploit communities that do not have the resources to resist, and many of these industries are able to monopolize the job market. One example that illuminates the fact that the issue tackled in this project is fundamentally a class struggle is that of poverty rates in Appalachia, specifically in eastern Kentucky. Kentucky has both Western Coal Fields, which are part of the Illinois Basin, and Eastern Coal Fields, which are part of the Appalachian coal basin. As coal deposits in the Western Basin contain more sulfur, there are more acute concerns about acid rain, and so coal is extracted at higher rates in eastern Kentucky. At the same time, according to the 2016 U.S. Census Bureau, 9 of the 30 poorest counties in the U.S. are in Eastern Kentucky. Pike County, the easternmost county in Kentucky, produces the most coal per year in Kentucky and is one of the nation's leading coal and natural gas producers, and yet has a median household income of \$32,972 compared to the state average of \$46,535. While the price of coal was rising between

2000 and 2008, with an 823% increase, mine workers in Appalachia haven't seen the same hike in their wages.⁸² The paradoxical existence of both economic growth and rampant poverty is especially glaring as we come face to face with the fact that "the counties that produce the most coal in Appalachia are often the poorest".⁸³ This is a regional example of the resource curse that I described in Chapter 1. As coal companies move out of Kentucky, seeking to make profit in new forms of energy, they leave behind barren forests and stripped mountains, that lead to an increase in both the frequency and intensity of flash floods. The inhabitant of these mining communities are left to with an increasingly difficult and shrinking job market, with an underdeveloped infrastructure that is not able to withstand frequent flooding, and without the means to rebuild their communities to be more resilient to the effects of this environmental destruction. Furthermore, as the mining operations expose communities to environmental toxins, they are also taking away modes of subsistence from the impoverished. Coal mining has poisoned water sources and the land around it, making it difficult or even downright dangerous to grow food in many previously arable areas, and has forced the local population to buy bottled water rather than being able to rely on their own sources of water. This leads to an increasingly adverse relationship to land, that is not even just a resource or commodity, but a further source of danger. This also means that these communities are even more reliant on exploitative capitalist markets in order to obtain things that are necessary for their survival, such as fresh food and drinking water. When entire communities are living paycheck to paycheck, they are not able to invest in many of the tools that would help them adequately respond to the natural catastrophes that are

⁸² Silas House and Jason Howard, *Something's Rising: Appalachians Fighting Mountaintop Removal* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 13.

⁸³ House and Howard, *Something's Rising*, 12.

becoming more and more frequent as a consequence of the severing of humans' relationship to the environment.

While entire nations are preparing themselves for their own disappearance, while working class communities of color are still lacking clean water and housing since the last climate disaster⁸⁴, the wealthiest of the wealthy are simply investing in a Pinkerton revival to assure the continuation of their lifestyle if (or when) disaster strikes. The Pinkertons have, of course, been a tool too maintain class divisions since their creation. In the early 1850's Allan Pinkerton's Pinkerton National Detective Agency used novel investigation methods, such as infiltrating gangs and developing networks of informants, to police the frontier west of Mississippi. As the frontier expanded within the next decade, the Pinkertons started addressing a growing issue in company towns — that of labour organizing. Between the 1870's and the early 1890's the Pinkertons broke up around 70 labor strikes, and as an organized hired mercenaries, this was more often done through brute force than tactic negotiations. The Homestead strike of 1892, also known as the homestead massacre, was a pivotal event both for organized labour and for the Pinkertons. In its aftermath, Congress along with 23 states banned government bodies from hiring mercenaries as strikebreakers. However, this was not the end for Pinkerton as an agency. Instead, it rebranded several times and was eventually absorbed by the Swedish security giant Securitas AB. One of its many new services includes Pinkerton Dedicated Professional, "in which agents join a client's company like any other new hire, allowing them to provide intel on employees"⁸⁵. Another one includes protecting both the assets and physical resources of those

⁸⁴ "Fourteen Years Later, New Orleans Is Still Trying to Recover from Hurricane Katrina | Article | EESI." Accessed March 26, 2020.

⁸⁵ Noah Gallagher Shannon, "Climate Chaos Is Coming — and the Pinkertons Are Ready." *The New York Times*, April 10, 2019, sec. Magazine.

who can afford it in the coming climate chaos. This service assumes that “the sectors that rely on cheap labor will face more unrest among workers; the state will struggle to keep up with crime” and that the Pinkertons will once again become a valuable tool for the upper class. As some communities struggled to get the resources they needed during the 2017 hurricane season, “the Pinkertons chartered half a dozen planes across the Caribbean, each of them full of food and under armed escort, to the tune of around \$100,000 each.”⁸⁶ Class divide will only deepen as climate change takes its toll. The separation of humans from the rest of nature has played its part in the current climate disaster, and although climate change may be a worldwide phenomenon, its effects are not universally felt. As things get worse those that have the resources to do so will still be able to provide for themselves and protect everything that they have hoarded, reusing the same tactics they used as they hoarded the profit gained from coal mining. Those that are able to will retain their own little pieces of nature, while those populations that are already disadvantaged and oppressed by virtue of their race, gender or class, and often a combination of a multitude of those and other factors, “live in environments where they experience more pollution and less capacity to have meaningful connections with the nonhuman world.”⁸⁷ The struggle to change humans’ relationship to the environment is an existential struggle, for some. For others it is more a question of comfort. It is this difference that makes the fight for better relations between humans and the rest of nature a class struggle, a fact that will become ever clearer as the stakes rise.

⁸⁶ Shannon, “Climate Chaos Is Coming — and the Pinkertons Are Ready.”

⁸⁷ Whyte, “Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice”, 137.

Internationalism as a Solution to Nationalism

Evidently, one's position in this class hierarchy that is so central to capitalism is deeply connected to the issue of how the global framework set up by the existence of nation-states informs our relationship to nature. It is a class struggle because depending on your position in this hierarchy, your interest in changing the relationship between humans and their environment varies greatly. It is also a class struggle because the lens through which you view our relationship to nature and the effects it has had will change what solutions seem favourable, and what a future relationship to nature may look like. In order to overcome the divide between humans and the rest of nature, we must also tackle the systems described in the previous chapters. Although there are various anti-capitalist responses to the issue raised here, I am pointed in the direction of a broader understanding of internationalism. As the apparatuses that I have explored in the previous two chapters show, any action that seeks to restore the relationship between humans and the rest of nature can not limit its scope to only oppose capitalism, but needs to address the existence of the nation-state as well. This necessity leads quite easily to internationalism, albeit one that does not only include humans. In *Ambiguous Identities* Wallerstein and Balibar propose "setting an internationalist politics of citizenship against a nationalist one"⁸⁸, in part to regain a practical humanism. An internationalist politics generally advocates for the transcendence of nationalism and for the unification of people across national divisions. Internationalism is obviously one of the guiding principles of the communist Internationals one through four. Historically however, internationalism has not always had a clearly oppositional relationship to nationalism, or to the system of nation-states. Rather than opposing the very existence of the

⁸⁸ Immanuel Wallerstein and Étienne Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 64.

nation-state, it could also simply push for a more cooperative relationship between the states rather than the naturally competitive one, in this way relying on their existence. The second International, the Socialist International, held its last meeting in 1912 in Switzerland, and in anticipation of World War I resolved that it was the duty of the working class to “intervene in favor of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilize the economic and political crisis created by the war to arouse the people and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule.”⁸⁹ However, as war broke out, many of socialist parties of the International sided with their respective governments and nation-states, betraying the internationalist principle. Internationalism, at the root of its word, is still based on the existence of separate and sovereign nation-states, and calls for greater cooperation between nation-states within that framework.

Perhaps it is because of this that Heidegger argued that nationalism cannot be overcome through internationalism, which will only expand it and raise it to a global system (“Der Nationalismus wird durch den bloßen Internationalismus nicht überwunden, sondern nur erweitert und zum System erhoben.”⁹⁰). Nationalism will not be overcome by mere internationalism, rather it will only be expanded and raised to the system. Instead of internationalism leading to the abolishment of nationalism, as internationalism becomes the framework within which all crisis are analyzed, the structure of the nation-state will be systematized, leaving no room for thought that seeks to grow outside of this structure which can only accommodate that which happens in the relations between nations. Heidegger touches on the subject of nationalism several times in his *Letter on Humanism*, writing that this way of

⁸⁹ “Manifesto of the International Socialist Congress at Basel by Social Democracy.” Accessed March 16, 2020.

⁹⁰ Martin Heidegger, “Brief über den ‘Humanismus’”, *Wegmarken*, (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2013), 341.

viewing humans from the point of view of the nation, rather than that of being, makes humans simply an object within the framework of the nation-state, as a tool that can be used in order to structure the world instead of seeing our capacity beyond being an object within that system of understanding. As human beings turn nature into an object to be exploited, and as humans themselves become a tool that is waiting to be used and exploited by both the nation-state and capital, we lose the capacity to think of humans as part of nature. We become unable to think of the people and environment around us outside of the framework of the nation-state for as long as we are participants in this framework, even if we advocate for more cooperation within it. Even with this cooperation between nation-states, there is an undeniable separation or divide between the humans and nature of one nation-state to those of the other nation-state, who are ultimately only willing to work together for as long as this seems beneficial, but have no sense of living a shared existence.

There have been some proposed solutions to this in the past already, such as what Michael Hardt and Toni Negri call an “antinationalist” internationalism, where

“internationalism was the will of an active mass subject that recognized that the nation-states were key agents of capitalist exploitation and that the multitude was continually drafted to fight their senseless wars – in short, that the nation-state was a political form whose contradictions could not be subsumed and sublimated but only destroyed. International solidarity was really a project for the destruction of the nation-state and the construction of a new global community.”⁹¹

⁹¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 49.

In order to have an antinationalist internationalism it has to work to not only bring about a better understanding between the nation-states, but it has to build a coalition between the inhabitants of the various nations with the goal of destroying the very structure in which it is embedded. It has to be seen not as a project between the states themselves, or by various industries within those nation-states, but by the masses working around and against them. It, as a movement, cannot hold out hope that nation-states can ever be part of a larger internationalism, or that a global community of solidarity can be formed alongside or in the spaces between nation-states. In short, this antinationalist internationalism cannot work with or within the system. This internationalism must stand in wholehearted opposition to the existence of nation-states and of the capitalist system. According to Derrida, perhaps what we need then is a completely new so called internationalism, one that is “without party, without country, without national community (International before, across, and beyond any national determination), without co-citizenship, without common belonging to a class.”⁹² Derrida’s New International is meant to respond to what he sees as the ten plagues of the global capital system, and maybe the global consequences of human estrangement to nature, and to humanity itself, could qualify as the eleventh plague. In this sense, International is merely borrowing and corrupting the word national, as it strictly rejects any form of national community. There is no co-citizenship which implies the existence of divided nations and of needing citizenship to belong. There is not even a common belong to class. And, although I have argued that our environmental crisis is a class struggle, it is important to remember that it

⁹² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 107.

is not *just* a class struggle. It is not just a class struggle because our current understanding of class divisions do not include non-human beings. It is a struggle that extends itself across all forms of life, and so needs a solution whose scope is equally as broad. However, the relationship between human and non-human nature is essential for our understanding of class politics. Non-human nature and capitalism intersect at the point of appropriation, as detailed earlier in the chapter, and so capitalism's exploitation relies on appropriation, and with that on the severed relationship between humans and the rest of nature. As of now, the struggle over the relationship between humans and the rest of nature is not *just* a class struggle because non-human nature is not included in our conception of the class struggle. If we are able to expand our understanding of class relations to include non-human beings and their appropriation as well, then the gap between the struggle over the relation between humans and non-humans and the class struggle will be bridged, and our relationship to non-human nature will be part of and strengthen the class struggle. In order to mend our relationship to the rest of nature, there needs to be a framework that allows for this kind of growth to take place, a global system that is not fundamentally opposed to a new relationship between human and non-human nature. In this way, class politics will no longer leave behind so much of the world, and the triumph of the working class will not depend on the continued appropriation of that which we consider to be non-human nature. Class solidarity in this way must include all those whose labor and resources are exploited and appropriated.

Humans and Nonhuman Nature in Appalachia

The question of how we mend, or make new, our relationship to nature is already being addressed in Appalachia. Just as the region has a history of violent exploitation, it certainly doesn't lack a rich history of radical resistance. At the height of company owned towns, resistance largely started by focusing on struggles that accompanied these communities. Gaventa writes about one path of resistance in Clear Fork Valley, that of the Model Valley. With the spread of War on Poverty programs, many rural communities were still left without assistance, and had to find adequate solutions for the plight of their community themselves. In Clear Fork Valley this took the form of a community-owned, -operated, and -managed pallet factory and four community-owned health clinics. This led to working class communities owning and running their own health care systems, child development centers, and housing projects. Of course, this project came with its fair share of bureaucratic difficulties, but it had far reaching consequences. As the project grew and its vision was able to broaden, demands grew “from those involving little conflict against the existing order (garbage collection) to the development of alternatives to that order (a factory, clinics) to the notion of challenging the order itself (land demands)”⁹³. As demands became more radical, contradictory interests became evermore exposed. These contradictions led to conflict, largely centered around labour disputes in mining towns. Unfortunately, not only were many of those conflicts bloody and ended in the loss of many workers' lives, the issue of multinational companies made it even more difficult for communities to voice their dissent. When the inhabitant of Clear Fork wanted to voice their grievances against the mining company, they were told that the American Association, Ltd. was

⁹³ John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 212.

managed in London, while the local community had no access to any representatives that could find any way to access company management in England. Due to the way the mining frontier had been established, owing its existence to the project of national expansion and of the capitalist creation of resource frontiers, pathways to resistance are deliberately obscured. As Gaventa states, “the point for power is this: not only could the Clear Fork citizens not gain access to the decision-making agenda of the multinational, but they could not even discover for certain who financially controlled it or how the control was maintained.”⁹⁴ It is difficult to oppose a mechanism that keeps itself so obscured, especially when those that would have the power to hold such players accountable also profit from the system. Even through these difficulties, the local community development projects in the Clear Fork Valley “did help to create a climate for the emergence of protest”⁹⁵, and as the very foundation of many Appalachian communities rests in issues of exploitation of both nature and workers the underlying tensions cannot be quelled.

More recently, Appalachia has seen a revival of local radical organizing which actively rails against the systems of power that have been treated as inherent by those who profit off them. Elizabeth Catte, co-chair of the rural outreach committee, and a steering committee member for the DSA chapter in Charlottesville, Virginia, writes about the growth of socialist networks in and around Virginia⁹⁶. The formation of worker cooperatives and the encouragement of communal land ownership are particularly interesting in terms of how they can change our relationship to land, where it is no longer the goal to squeeze every cent of profit out of it and then discard it, but rather to foster a long term relationship to the land and the nature that lives

⁹⁴ Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 244.

⁹⁵ Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 217.

⁹⁶ Eric Kerl, Interview with Elizabeth Catte, *International Socialist Review*, Issue #110.

off it. Catte writes “From my vantage point in West Virginia and southwestern Virginia, what is old is new again: the revival of a labor movement, the fight against extractive capitalism”⁹⁷ amongst others. It makes sense that areas such as Appalachia, which have been ravaged by the extractive logic of capitalism, would have a strong counter movement as well. The rich history of resistance in Appalachia may well pave the way forward, connecting their local struggles to those of the working class on a national, and hopefully global, level as well. The struggles of the working class are only exacerbated by continued environmental destruction. Just as entire communities suffered from the consequences of mountain-top removal and strip mining, the working class all over the world risks losing their communities due to climate change. Just as the degradation of the environment is a global problem, the fight against it also has a unique potential to be both local and universal, to be a fight for the future that can rest on a rich tradition of resistance. So, “When Ocasio-Cortez asks if voters are prepared to choose people over money, I hear echoes of a much older question that still resonates in Appalachia: Which side are you on?”⁹⁸ The work of identifying the other side has largely been done, but what is still left is to define our own side. Our side cannot be limited by what is possible and who we can include within a capitalist nation-state framework, and in order to move beyond that we have to break down the divide between humans and non-human nature, and recognize that our side includes many more lifeforms than one might think. Reducing social inequalities and building a healthy relationship to the environment often go hand in hand, and the “environmental justice movement in Appalachia, therefore, presents a potential example of this type of synergism.”⁹⁹ Areas like

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Catte, “Finding the Future in Radical Rural America ” Boston Review, July 9, 2019.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Richard York, “Re-Envisioning Development in Appalachia: Thoughts on What is Worth Sustaining”, *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Spring 2016), 17.

Appalachia have been especially affected by the manufacturing of a divide between human and non-human nature by the expansion of both nation-states and capitalism. However, at the core of this situation we may also be able to find, and grow, a solution that addresses all of the facets of this crisis. That is because in Appalachia it is laid bare that the issues of economic justice and environmental justice are so tightly linked, and in fact cannot be separated. Any solution that adequately addresses one issue must also address the other. This is the premise of the Green New Deal, which focuses on a just transition and creating a future that protects the environment by once again emphasizing that human well-being is tied to environmental well-being, and adjusting our economy to reflect this. So when Appalachian movements organize communities around land reforms or to move away from the use of fossil fuels, they are moving communities to a system where their economic survival does not depend on the exploitation and appropriation of nature. In order to mend the relationship between human and non-human nature, the common interests of these two forces that are, for now, still seen as separate, must be made obvious. The path forward must show that human and non-human nature do not stand in opposition to one another. By finding the forces that have created this crisis it becomes possible to find alternatives, and to finally tie together the wellbeing of humans with the wellbeing of the rest of the world through the restoration or creation of deep bonds and relationships between all forms of life.

Conclusion

The environmental movements and class politics must go hand in hand if they hope to be successful and lead to a better world for all inhabitants. If the environmental movement does not address its issues through a class lense, extractive industries are able to use their monopoly on

the job market in large areas to weaken the environmental struggle. Likewise, if worker's movements do not take resource extraction and environmental degradation into consideration, they leave out a large number of people who are directly affected by these issues, and are not able to build a movement that spans its solidarity across all working people of the world. Furthermore, neither movements will be able to build a system that minimizes the effects that climate change has and will continue to have on living beings all over the world. The notion of class struggle, although fitting, must be expanded to better suit the conflicts that must be addressed nowadays, and to include all those that have been both exploited and appropriated by capitalism. Despite the fact that mending and reimagining the relationship between humans and non-human nature is a complex task, it is also an incredibly urgent task. Fostering a systematic understanding of the capitalist nation-state framework that has led to our current situations, while also drawing on movements and relationships to nature that are already practiced today, could help build a solid foundation for the future and provide imaginable visions to address a crisis that can seem overwhelming.

Conclusion

“Never under capitalism have the majority been asked about the world we’d like to live in. To dream, and to dream seditiously, is something that many humans need to practice, for we have been prevented from doing it for centuries.”

Patel and Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*¹⁰⁰

The aim of this thesis is to show that the global capitalist nation-state framework does not allow for a balanced and reciprocal relationship with nature, and must necessarily lead to environmental exploitation and appropriation. It seeks to connect the existence of the nation-state with the exploitative nature of capitalism, and the ways in which the two systems strengthen each other to the detriment of the people living under it. A close analysis of the history and process that led to the existence of nation-states helps substantiate the claim that the nation-state and the existence of a capitalist world-economy are tightly linked, and furthermore that the combination of these systems allow for extractive industries to thrive at the cost of the earth and its inhabitants. With my first chapter, I strived to reach an understanding of the core or essence of the nation-state system, to argue that it is inherent for the existence of the nation-state to damage nature. In order to connect this to resource extraction industries, the second chapter focused on building the link between nation-states and capitalism, and its central thesis was reflected in the case study of coal mining in Appalachia. The in-depth exploration of this complex framework led to the point of intersection of class politics and environmental politics, and pointed the way forward. With the third chapter I was able to explore the ways in which class politics and environmental politics can, and must, be intertwined, for the sake of the common interests of

¹⁰⁰ Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 211.

both human and non-human nature. By laying out the ways in which the capitalist nation-state framework has continuously compromised the wellbeing of people and other natures, this project reached a tentative conclusion: we must foster a conception of — and relationship with — nature that moves beyond the limitations of the nation-state and that broadens the class struggle to include nature. This convergence of class politics and nature is deeply important to both class based movements and environmental movements, as neither one is able to address the full scope of the crisis we face today without addressing the shared interests of the various parties that are affected by it.

Due to the constraints on both time and length within this project, it was limited to the themes mentioned above, but there is a collection of other directions this research could still take, and many doors are still open and beckoning for an eager listener to pass through. In particular, given more time I would like to research how the conception of nature that is laid out in the third chapter might be able to exist alongside and collaborate with current indigenous conceptions of human and non-human nature and with anti-colonial forms of resistance. Given the chance, this project could also be developed to delve further into the question of citizenship — who can be a citizen, and how does the structure of citizenship affect the relations between citizens and non-citizens in the human realm, as well as in the non-human realm? The question of citizenship must be tackled as climate change forces migration and creates more refugees, but I would be equally curious to explore how the very existence of citizenship has shaped and might continue to shape the world in broader terms. In all the ways in which this project could be further developed, it's important to be mindful of the various communities that are already relating to nature in a way that does not correspond to the framework that was considered in the

first two chapters, and to learn from them and try to see where this project would fit alongside various relationships between human and non-human nature.

Any further exploration of this topic would emphasize the need for a positive movement, in the sense that it not only critiques that which we need to abolish, but also works to create something new, a broad coalition that strives towards a common world. Returning to Wallerstein and Balibar one final time, they write that “Having the same enemy does not, however, imply either having the same immediate interests or the same form of consciousness or, *a fortiori*, a totalization of the various struggles”¹⁰¹. Most of us are threatened by the effects of a non-reciprocal relationship with nature, although not all in the same way (as emphasized in the previous chapter), but having a common enemy or disastrous fate does not automatically create a unified front. One aspect that I was not able to include in my thesis, but that is nonetheless crucial to any work going forward, is the existence of alternative relationships to nature that do not align themselves with the causes that I envision, or that in fact actively oppose them. Movements such as ecofascism, that combine a struggle towards a “clean” future and fortified connection to nature with both hidden and overt ethnonationalist tendencies, cannot be given any room to grow as an alternative. To counteract such movements it is necessary to not only critique our current situation, but to offer a positive alternative. In the future, I would like to address this need by seeing what a reciprocal and class based relationship to nature would look like concretely and how it would change many aspects of our society, and at the same time what aspects would need to be changed in order to facilitate such a relationship in the first place. Of course, I would also like to dedicate more time and a much more detailed analysis to how such a

¹⁰¹ Immanuel Wallerstein and Étienne Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 13.

relationship with nature would affect our response to climate change here and now. In the end, in order to build a positive movement it is necessary to let ourselves dream about a broad scope of possibilities, and to be able to think outside the system that we are currently in. While this thesis has been, to me, a fruitful start, I would like to dream much bigger still.

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