



REVISTA DA ANINTER-SH
Volume 2, 2025 – Artigo: 15
ISSN: 2965-954X
Received: 21/11/2025
Accepted: 29/12/2025

D.O.I. <http://dx.doi.org/10.69817/2965-954X/v2a15>

WHAT IS THE ANDROCENE

O QUE É O ANDROCENO

Ariel Salleh ¹

Abstract

The text argues that the concept of the Anthropocene does not adequately explain the historical and structural causes of the planetary crisis. It proposes replacing the term *Anthropocene* with *Androcene*, a term that designates a global system grounded in patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist domination. This perspective emphasizes that ecological collapse is not the result of “humanity as a species,” but rather of specific power relations that privilege masculinist, Eurocentric, and extractivist logics. The article begins by identifying the roots of the Androcene in ancient dualisms—Humanity over Nature, Masculine over Feminine, White over Black—which, sedimented over centuries, continue to shape modern institutions, sciences, and languages. The text introduces the idea of a global matrix of debts in which workers, women, Indigenous peoples, youth, and non-human species are exploited through social, embodied, generational, livelihood, and species debts. As its main findings, the text argues that the patriarchal-colonial-capitalist system operates as a dialectical unity, generating ecological and social crises that cannot be solved through isolated identity-based politics nor through technocratic solutions. It highlights the emergence of a “movement of movements”—ecofeminist, Indigenous, labor, and youth struggles—that seek to overcome the dissociative logic of the Androcene and build regenerative and ecocentric futures. The text concludes that real transformation requires breaking with anthropocentrism and adopting a relational, embodied materialist perspective, recognizing that human beings are nature in embodied form.

Keywords: Androcene; Ecofeminism; Coloniality and Capitalism

Resumo

O texto sustenta que o conceito de Antropoceno não explica devidamente as causas históricas e estruturais da crise planetária. Propõe a substituição do termo Antropoceno por Androceno, termo que designa um sistema global baseado na dominação patriarcal, colonial e capitalista. Essa abordagem destaca que o colapso ecológico não resulta da “humanidade enquanto espécie”, mas de relações de poder específicas que privilegiam lógicas masculinistas, eurocêntricas e extrativistas. O artigo parte da identificação das raízes do Androceno em dualismos antigos — Humanidade sobre Natureza, Masculino sobre Feminino, Branco sobre Negro — que, incorporados ao longo dos séculos, continuam moldando instituições, ciências e linguagens modernas. O texto apresenta a ideia de uma matriz global de dívidas, na qual trabalhadores, mulheres, povos indígenas, jovens e espécies não humanas são explorados por meio de dívidas sociais, corporificadas, geracionais, de subsistência e de espécie.

¹ Visiting Professor in the Institute of Humanities, Arts, and Sciences at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil: www.arielsalleh.info. An early version of this paper was presented at the panel Futures of the Anthropocene: How Social Movements Fight for Justice, International Sociological Association Forum, Rabat, July 2025.

Como principais resultados o texto aponta que o sistema patriarcal-colonial-capitalista opera como uma unidade dialética, gerando crises ecológicas e sociais que não podem ser solucionadas por políticas identitárias isoladas nem por soluções tecnocráticas. Destaca o crescimento de um “movimento dos movimentos” — lutas ecofeministas, indígenas, operárias e juvenis — que buscam superar a lógica dissociativa do Androceno e construir futuros regenerativos e ecocêntricos. Conclui que a transformação real exige romper com o antropocentrismo e adotar uma perspectiva relacional e materialista-encarnada, reconhecendo que os seres humanos são natureza em forma incorporada.

Palavras-chave: Androceno; Ecofeminismo; Colonialidade e Capitalismo

Who said Anthropocene?

Certainly the Anthropocene idea has not been without its critics. Building on Paul Crutzen's original focus on fossil fuel emissions, the concept was broadened substantially by scientist Will Stephen and colleagues. They highlighted 'the great acceleration' in planetary destabilisation following World War II and the rise in consumer lifestyles, international trade, and high tech innovation.

Meanwhile, Humanities scholars led by Noel Castree drew attention to the common tendency among scientists to 'naturalise' the Anthropocene as a 'species activity'. This bypassed the sociologically obvious fact that workers, women, and indigenous peoples were neither responsible for the design of industrial modernity, nor rewarded by it.

Alf Hornborg and Andreas Malm suggested replacing the term Anthropocene with Capitalocene, a socialist move, popularised in the US by Jason Moore. Eric Swyngdouw preferred to call it The Anthro-Obscene, and for anarchist philosopher John Clark it is simply a Necrocene.

Creative labels for the new planetary era continue to proliferate, although Franciszek Chwalczyk's survey of Anthropocene literature shows that studies developed with a sex/gendered awareness are lacking.² On this basis, the present ecological feminist interrogation of the Anthropocene label surely deserves consideration?

A Libidinal Rift

Cultures embodying masculinist domination, extending back thousands of years were the first model of political domination and remain the bottom line of our global *Androcene* civilisation today. The common practice has been to set men up as Humanity proper, standing over an objectified Nature comprising Women, Indigenous peoples, Children and Animals³.

This ancient 'libidinal rift' created women as the second sex and first colony, and it

² This literature is discussed in the section 'Resisting Extinction', in Ariel Salleh, *DeColonize EcoModernism!* London: Bloomsbury, 2024, 1-17.

³ As can be seen in the figure at the end of this paper.

expressed a deeply lived disconnection from life-itself. The next phase of *Androcene* othering would be tribal, extending outwards across nature's territories with the appropriation and colonisation of lands and the enslavement of bodies.

People, including sociologists, usually talk as if capitalism is *sui generis* and a self-reproducing system. But the story is more complex. It was extractive colonisation that enabled the growth of this economic system. Thus, patriarchal-colonial-capitalist practices actually form a single dialectical whole, with each sub-system growing out of - and yet continuing to reinforce - the one that preceded it.

As cultures become sedimented over centuries of social interaction, habits are internalised as rules. Day by day, individuals recharge such customs with their own embodied energies. Institutions such as the nation state or even science are fuelled by this collective sublimation of the divide Humanity over Nature, Masculine over Feminine, White over Black. The languages of law, economics, even philosophy, are taken for granted as a 'second nature' - and in this way, the illusions of patriarchal domination are legitimised and sealed into consciousness.

The Pseudo-Logic of Dualism

The *Androcene* is a vibrant historically evolved complex of patriarchal-colonial-capitalist privilege and rulemaking. Over millennia, it has expanded across the world from local civilizations and religious rites, through tribal invasions and imperial adventures, arriving at its modern capitalist phase some 500 years ago.

This largely Eurocentric trajectory was nurtured by the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Islam, Christianity; the classical logic of Greece; the 17th century scientific Enlightenment; Thomas Hobbes' theory of the state; and nineteenth-century evolutionism. However, my concern is where the action is right now – that is, with grassroots ecological, feminist, decolonial, and socialist movement efforts to break free of social and political institutions that are anti-life.

Whereas Anthropocene researchers calculate geophysical shifts, living beings are infused with another kind of time, a living metabolism of 'materially embodied' energies – libidinal and unconscious, intentional and judgmental. In fact, the Earthwide changes that scientists classify under 'deep geological time' have their real material source in a 'deep affective time'.

This embodied historical process shows up everyday in the false universalizing dualisms of Humanity over Nature, Subject over Object, Mind over Body, and so on. But these habits of thought are preconscious and clouded in centuries of denial. Even in a supposedly rational techno-efficient modernity, this pseudo-logic serves to hold together the entanglement

of patriarchal-colonial-capitalist powers.

While the reproductive logic of living metabolisms in nature are relational, the culture of *Androcene* logic is one-dimensional. Its contemporary hegemonic force is recognised by Argentine decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo when he writes: 'Linear global thinking is the story of how Europe mapped the world for its own benefit and left a fiction that became an ontology: a division of the world into East and West, South and North, or First, Second and Third'.⁴

Global Matrix of Debt

Under the patriarchal-colonial-capitalist system all life-giving energies circulating through nature are appropriated for maintaining the hierarchy of *Androcene* power. The outcome is a planetary hierarchy of extractivism.

- Workers and slaves, men or women, white or Black, have a 'social debt' owed to them by the capitalist employer's systematic underpayment of their labour time.
- Indigenous foragers, peasant smallholders and displaced refugees have a 'livelihood debt' owed to them for appropriation of their lands and skills, under the contemporary form of colonization known as 'development'.
- Women have an 'embodied debt' owed to them for daily services freely provided like domestic care, sexual gratification and/or reproduction, and even surrogate pregnancy.
- Youth have a 'generational debt' owed to them by a global economic system that transfers many collateral costs of the patriarchal-colonial-capitalist imperium into the future. The sexualised predation of children is another generational theft.
- A 'species debt' occurs as animal and plant lives are taken for food, clothing, transport, manufacture and recreational hunting. Meanwhile, living biodiversity is re-engineered into commodities from medical products to biological weapons.⁵

The entire system of life-regenerating flows between Outer Space and the Earth is disabled by *Androcene* indifference to nature's living metabolism, setting in motion waves of entropic disintegration in a full-scale ecological, if not, 'planetary debt'.

The extractivism of the global debt matrix is at once moral and economic, thermodynamic, and genetic, and it maps a powerful rationale for a transversal social movement politics. However, while each material debt drives a particular social movement - workers, women, indigenous, youth - under the regime of neoliberal globalisation, these readily

⁴ Walter Mignolo, 'The North of the South and the West of the East: A Provocation to the Question', 2014: www.ibraaz.org/essays/108.

⁵ Ariel Salleh (ed.), *EcoSufficiency and Global Justice: Women write Political Ecology*. London: Pluto Press, 2009.

succumb to the master's capacity to 'divide and rule'.

The volumes of my trilogy known as *The Androcene and its Others* each deal with a dimension of this dilemma: *DeColonize EcoModernism!* is already published, with *EnGender EcoSocialism!* and *ReGround EcoFeminism!* forthcoming. The chapters are grounded in everyday political struggles and engage critically with a transdisciplinary literature developed by academic scholars.

A Sociology of Knowledge

In fact, the *Androcene* trilogy offers an ecological feminist sociology of knowledge, bringing home just how institutional and academic power are interwoven, so reflecting the ongoing force of the patriarchal-colonial-capitalist system. For to borrow philosopher Michel Foucault's term, the genealogy of environmentalism may well harbour assumptions that mislead our defence of life-on-Earth.

If the 21st century polycrisis involves a biogeochemical undoing of the planet, equally the crisis has social psychological dimensions seen in the horrors of instrumental rationality, Global South dispossession, violence on sex/gendered and racialised bodies, the hegemony of Green New Deals, and endless war.

Androcene indifference to life-itself can be found in academic philosophies from structuralism to deep ecology to posthuman fantasy. On the other hand, joined-up thinking allows the multiplicity of patriarchal-colonial-capitalist practices to be understood as a single global system. Each political layer in this continuum has grown out of the one before, but all three interact in an elective affinity, as sociologist Max Weber might have said.

While Karl Marx judged human alienation from nature to be an expression of capitalist economics and its break with the organic conditions of life, this is only partly true. Alienations arising from the ancient Humanity/Nature divide and its dualisms are far more fundamental and no less material in effect than the deprivations attributed to capital.

In response to the Left emphasis on 'relations of production', an ecofeminist analysis demands attention to 'relations of reproduction' that sustain modern globalization at its base. Healing life-on-Earth will call for much more than international summits for the promotion of socio-economic and technical fixes.

Dialectic of Internal Relations

Androcentric categories like time and space are not *a priori* truths. What sociologist Emile Durkheim labelled collective representations, peoples' ways of making sense of their world, are geographically unique, set in place by repetition, and reified over time. Later, social construction theorists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann spelled out a phenomenology of

how common everyday interactions lay down and reinforce what passes for common sense.

The Marxist dialectic likewise, treats action and thought as co-created. But political ecologists, even sociologists, are not always familiar with the preconscious processes that undergird their analyses. So in taking on the *Androcene* - that is patriarchal-colonial-capitalist relations as a dialectical unity, activists today must adopt a critical distance rather like the free-floating intellectuals of Karl Mannheim's first sociology of knowledge.

The libidinal origins of the *Androcentric* imperium are already clear in the ancient symbolism of threatening mother figures – the mythologies of Medea or Kali, for example, not to mention an unruly Mother Nature herself. Cultural analyst Mark Furlong observes

Deep in the psychic interior, these dark tropes survive as vestigial, embedded images. Confronted by climate collapse, bourgeoisie psychology and neoliberal ideology will jointly advocate that the self be militarised – that personal boundaries be strengthened, feelings cauterised, behaviours made strategic . . . Misogyny cannot understand that everything that lives exists interdependently. Nothing stands, or falls, on its own. Recognition of climate collapse is not only about the quantum and distribution of information. A complex psychological precondition must also be understood.⁶

The Culture of Dissociation

Since Plato, the Eurocentric mindset armed itself with universal and timeless essences, precursors of the contemporary obsession with measurable abstractions. Now the rise of new digital technologies leans heavily on the Cartesian vision of an objectified external world regulated by mathematical laws.

But a culture that separates Humanity from Nature functions by dissociation, its split consciousness relying on arbitrary dualisms to make sense of things. As Andrea Saltelli and Monica Di Fiore emphasise, today's scientific modelling too easily paves over the intersection of psychological rationalization and technical realities.⁷

Then again, recent work in the Humanities has favoured static totalizing synchronic models based on discourse analysis, leaving a gap in the explanation of how social life is materially constituted and embodied over time. An adequate sociology of knowledge will draw empirically on peoples' experience, both intentional and preconscious motivations. This is where activism can sharpen theory and *vice versa*.

Indeed, the last few decades have seen a worldwide peoples' resistance to the patriarchal-colonial-capitalist imperium. It constitutes a 'movement of movements', and is a

⁶ Mark Furlong, 'Looking for Eros in the Long Hard Rain of Climate Collapse', *Arena*, 13 (2023) 74-77.

⁷ Andrea Saltelli and Monica di Fiore (eds.), *The Politics of Modelling: Numbers between Science and Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.

praxis linking the concerns of women, indigenous peoples, workers and youth.

As a transversal politics grounded sensuously in a lived 'embodied materialism', this movement of movements is restoring peoples common cause with each other and with the Earth. To recall Furlong's words: 'wholeness requires that the anthropogenic world view be decentered.'

New Political Subjectivities

The Humanity/Nature split has been foundational in building the constructs of modern economics, law, science - and indeed, much environmental thinking. It can often be found in critical political perspectives too, such as liberal feminism or socialism.

But socialist analysis is not enough, decoloniality is not enough, feminism is not enough. On its own, each such analysis serves a form of identity politics - class, race, gender - that simply reinforces capitalist liberal ideology with its competitive, self-centered intersectional ethic.

In developing a unifying approach to workers, indigenous, women's, and ecological politics, one proposal would be that academics might cease partitioning their disciplines reductively into 'business-as-usual' specialisations - cultural studies for understanding patriarchal relations, anthropology for understanding colonial relations, economics for understanding capitalist relations.

Since the patriarchal-colonial-capitalist *Androcene* functions as a unified conjuncture, a consistent materialist analysis would acknowledge that 'humans-are-nature-in-embodied-form', so opening the way for new political subjectivities to be heard.

Moving beyond the dominant ideology means moving beyond anthropocentric reasoning; it demands an integrative 'ecocentric' lens.⁸

Regenerative Futures

Under the regime of patriarchal-colonial-capitalist modernity, women, peasants and indigenes come to politics from a zone of non-being – *terra nullius*. Embodied metaphors like 'mining virgin lands' or 'the rapacity of capital' are not coincidental; they are symptomatic of the *Androcene* unconscious.

The decolonial thinking of peasant and indigenous groups readily merges with the global wave of an ecofeminism that speaks the experience of women at the interface of labour with natural processes. These 'relations of reproduction' may be ecological, biological,

⁸Ariel Salleh, 'An EcoCentric Epistemology for EcoSocialism', in Leigh Brownhill, Salvatore Engel Di- Mauro, Terran Giacomini, Ana Isla, Michael Lowy, and Terisa Turner (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of EcoSocialism*, London: Routledge, 2022.

psychological, social and cultural.

As distinct from relations of production organised instrumentally by linear reason, relations of reproduction are guided by an open sensitivity to relational flows - in nature, and in humans as nature-embodied.

Recall that historically men's domination over women was the first model of social domination.⁹ Its hegemonic rationale established men as Humanity proper, while women and colonised peoples were defined as part of Nature - natural resources in fact.

Anthropologist Arturo Escobar from Colombia identifies this layered politics when he writes:

At one end we find matristic, convivial, futuring and, broadly speaking, relational visions that highlight the re/creation of worlds based on the horizontal relation with all forms of life, respecting human embeddedness in the natural world. At the other end of the spectrum there lies the dream, held by the flashy techno-Fathers of the moment, of a post-human world wholly created by 'Man'.¹⁰

A Transversal Politics

For decades, peoples have been striving to protect their life-ways against pressures to universalise their values under *Androcentric* norms. Reinforcing this now is a movement of movements, as activist networks reach out and committed intellectuals come forward. Their biocultural initiatives include the Zapatista of Mexico, Indian swaraj communities, WoMin in Africa, and Rojava women in Syria, US bioregionalists, Australian Aboriginal cultures of 'place', a World March of Women, and many others.

Other ecocentric subjectivities are explored in the book *Pluriverse: A Post Development Dictionary*.¹¹ This collects together essays from around the world describing how some cultures have learned to meet daily needs without causing a fatal 'metabolic rift' between Humanity and Nature, deeply exacerbated now by capitalism with its obsessive focus on accumulation.¹²

Escobar describes the inevitable outcome of a worldwide patriarchal-colonial-capitalist system, whose negation of the mother-body was its first step. So too, peoples reclaiming traditional territories do not speak of a repatriation to the fatherland, but of a rematriation.¹³

⁹ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*. Zed Books 1989; Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies, *The Subsistence Perspective*. London: Zed Books, 1993.

¹⁰ Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependencies, Autonomy and the Making of Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019, p. 27.

¹¹ Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta (eds.), *Pluriverse A PostDevelopment Dictionary*. New Delhi: Tulika, 2019.

¹² Ariel Salleh, 'From Metabolic Rift to Metabolic Value', *Organization & Environment*, 23 (2010) 205-219.

¹³ Leonardo Figueroa-Helland, 'Indigenous Pathways Beyond the Anthropocene', *New York University Environmental Law Journal*, 30 (2022) 347-412.

As peoples across the globe now join hands to build a life-affirming future, they come to see how body and territory are one. A sense of self as materially continuous with the natural world will be basic to planetary regeneration.

References

- BENNHOLDT-THOMSEN, Veronika; MIES, Maria.** *The subsistence perspective*. London: Zed Books, 1993.
- CHWAŁCZYK, Franciszek.** Around the Anthropocene in eighty names—considering the Urbanocene proposition. *Sustainability*, v. 12, n. 11, 2020. DOI: 10.3390/su12114458. [\[proquest.com\]](https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114458)
- CLARK, John P.** *Between Earth and Empire: From the Necrocene to the Beloved Community*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019. [\[monoskop.org\]](https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114458)
- CRUTZEN, Paul J.** Geology of mankind. *Nature*, v. 415, n. 6867, p. 23, 2002. DOI: 10.1038/415023a. [\[intechopen.com\]](https://doi.org/10.1038/415023a)
- ESCOBAR, Arturo.** *Designs for the pluriverse: Radical interdependencies, autonomy and the making of worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. DOI: 10.1215/9780822371816. [\[research.m...ster.ac.uk\]](https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822371816)
- FIGUEROA-HELLAND, Leonardo.** Indigenous pathways beyond the Anthropocene. *New York University Environmental Law Journal*, v. 30, 2022, p. 347–412.
- FURLONG, Mark.** Looking for Eros in the long hard rain of climate collapse. *Arena*, n. 13, 2023, p. 74–77.
- KOTHARI, Ashish; SALLEH, Ariel; ESCOBAR, Arturo; DEMARIA, Federico; ACOSTA, Alberto (org.).** *Pluriverse: A post-development dictionary*. New Delhi: Tulika, 2019.
- MIGNOLO, Walter.** The North of the South and the West of the East: A provocation to the question, 2014. Disponível em: <www.ibraaz.org/essays/108>.
- SALLETELI, Andrea; DI FIORE, Monica (org.).** *The politics of modelling: Numbers between science and policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.
- SALLEH, Ariel (org.).** *Eco-sufficiency and global justice: Women write political ecology*. London: Pluto Press, 2009.
- SALLEH, Ariel.** From metabolic rift to metabolic value. *Organization & Environment*, v. 23, 2010, p. 205–219.
- SALLEH, Ariel.** *DeColonize EcoModernism!* London: Bloomsbury, 2024.
- SALLEH, Ariel.** An ecocentric epistemology for ecosocialism. In: BROWNHILL, Leigh et al. (org.). *The Routledge handbook of ecosocialism*. London: Routledge, 2022.
- SHIVA, Vandana.** *Staying alive: Women, ecology and development*. London: Zed Books, 1989.

The Androcene and its Others

1/0 Imaginary
power and pollution
forced down



Terra Nullius
energy and labour
forced up