

WORLDEATER SERIES

colonialism caused planetary systems collapse

The sustainability industry is built to sustain a colonial world order. What have been, and continue to be, the narratives, mechanisms and systems that establish and advance colonial sustainability?

Colonial ecocide

In 2022, after decades of Global South lobbying, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) formally named colonialism as a historic and ongoing driver of the climate crisis. Colonialism is described by the IPCC as a longstanding strategy of land dispossession where deforestation, desertification, aridification and planting colonising vegetation renders the land on which indigenous peoples occupy uninhabitable and volatile.

Ecocide, or environmental destruction, is a favoured methodology for colonisation, as it is highly effective in

1. Eliminating or displacing indigenous inhabitants by reducing habitability, creating local markets for cheap and desperate labour through genocide and ethnocide,
2. Repurposing territories (ecological, human and mineral resources; geographic positions) for the economic profit and political leverage of colonisers,
3. Justifying a development narrative of “bringing rationality, advancement and progress” to what is deemed as “unproductive and empty wilderness”.

Colonial and settler colonial restructurings of local ecosystems have brought about ecocide on a planetary scale. Given the 20th and 21st centuries’ accelerated extractive capitalism, colonial ecocide has reached frenetic scales, crashing into planetary boundaries and cascading into planetary systems collapse.

And yet, the sustainability industry does not so much as acknowledge - let alone seek to address - enduring systems of coloniality as causes of environmental and societal harms.

Planetary systems collapse

Colonial and capitalist destruction of the natural world has been so total that planetary systems are now unable to rebalance themselves. This has led to runaway realities already occurring today, such as...

Planetary systems collapse

the Sixth Mass Extinction

- Homo sapiens represent less than 0.01% of living biomass, and yet colonial and capitalist culture practised by powerful groups within the species are responsible for destroying 83% of wild animals, 80% of marine animals and 50% of plants (Bar-On et al, 2018).
- By 2020, the total mass of objects produced by humanity's capitalist culture exceeded the total mass of living matter on Earth. The total mass of plastic that existed on the planet in 2020 exceeded the mass of animals for the first time in history (Elhacham et al, 2020).

the inevitable and imminent collapse of the thermohaline circulation (THC)

- Ocean circulation has a large impact on the climate of the Earth, and is driven by global wind circulation and THC. Both mechanisms are declining due to global heating. The THC is forecasted by various climate science models to collapse entirely within 10-50 years.
- THC collapse will cause significant and severe changes in regional and local climate across the planet, accelerating species extinction and societal collapse.

the violent decline of a global modern Western civilisation, leading to collapsing societies everywhere, as seen in

- escalations of resource grabs and exacerbation of military conflict across the Global South, resulting in the swelling of the global military industrial complex
- political lurches towards xenophobic, racist and nationalist fascism and accompanying spirals of divisive algorithm-fuelled propaganda
- declining standards of physical, public and societal health in human societies, particularly in nutritional and mental health as a result of systemic societal and parental neglect
- widening gulfs in inequality in all human societies, along conventional colonial divide-and-conquer lines, such as ethnicity and religion

Imperial environmentalism

In recent decades, ecological conservation and environmental sustainability projects that further monopolise resources have been implemented by wealthy actors, such as

- fortress conservation projects funded and led by Global North "development aid" agencies and non-profit organisations, or
- industrial operations for renewable energy projects carried out via public-private partnerships.

The rationale here is to remedy colonial ecocide with colonial sustainability.

These efforts continue to displace, alienate and dehumanise indigenous and traditional cultures, and silence environmental and human rights activists who protest against them. It's as though colonisation never ended.

