

There exists a global environmental crisis, and levels of consumption and consumerism (overdevelopment and the culture of capitalising) are major, if not the only, causes.

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Introduction

'Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not enough for every man's greed.' Yet 'greed' and 'need' become indistinguishable" (Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil, & François Gemenne 2015). In recent decades, the rapid growth of consumerism and the dominance of capitalism as an economic system have ushered in an era of unprecedented overdevelopment. While this phenomenon has propelled economic progress and improved living standards for many, it has also exacted a heavy toll on the earth, leading to a global environmental crisis, namely climate change. The term environmental crisis is distinguished by rapid and largely unexpected changes in environmental quality that become difficult, if not impossible, to reverse (Taylor 2009). Inadvertently or not, humans have contributed to the environmental catastrophe, which has resulted in the depletion of natural resources, deforestation, pollution, and ultimately climate change, as a result of our consumption habits and patterns. It then becomes incumbent upon us to reverse the order of that priority, given that humanity has been confronted with an environmental crisis (Ingold 2000). This essay contends that the combination of high levels of consumerism caused by overdevelopment and the dominant underlying culture of capitalism has resulted in a global environmental crisis of alarming proportions, namely, climate change. Moreover, I also firmly believe that the incorporation of traditional indigenous knowledge and perspectives with modern environmental methodologies is an essential prerequisite for achieving a viable and enduring future. This additional notion will be explored further.

The environmental crisis

Prior to delving deeper into the significant role that varying degrees of consumerism play in the present crisis, it is imperative that we first comprehend the meaning of "crisis" within the environmental framework. According to Taylor (2009), for a crisis to occur, there has to first be a substantial and rapid environmental transition. Secondly, it is imperative that there be a certain level of irreversibility. For instance, it's hard to see why any environmental change should be cause for alarm if resources or nature recover rapidly, but it is a different narrative if recovery takes a century or more. Finally, any alteration to the environment must lead to a substantial reduction in well-being. Therefore, the extent of harm caused cannot be insignificant. Environmental issues are commonly considered crises because of their significant impact, severity, and long-lasting consequences. Climate change, in particular, thus becomes an undeniable global environmental crisis that exist due to its extensive and profound effects on a global scale.



A multitude of factors, such as the societal values of capitalism and the excessive consumerism resulting from overdevelopment, have significantly contributed to the phenomenon of climate change on a global scale. The exhaustion of natural resources poses a significant risk to the accessibility of vital goods and services while also giving rise to social and geopolitical disputes. The need for timber and arable land has resulted in widespread deforestation, which has decreased biodiversity and disrupted vital ecosystems, worsening the effects of climate change. The act of pollution involves the discharge of detrimental substances into the atmosphere, bodies of water, and land, which leads to the deterioration of ecosystems, puts biodiversity in peril, and worsens the

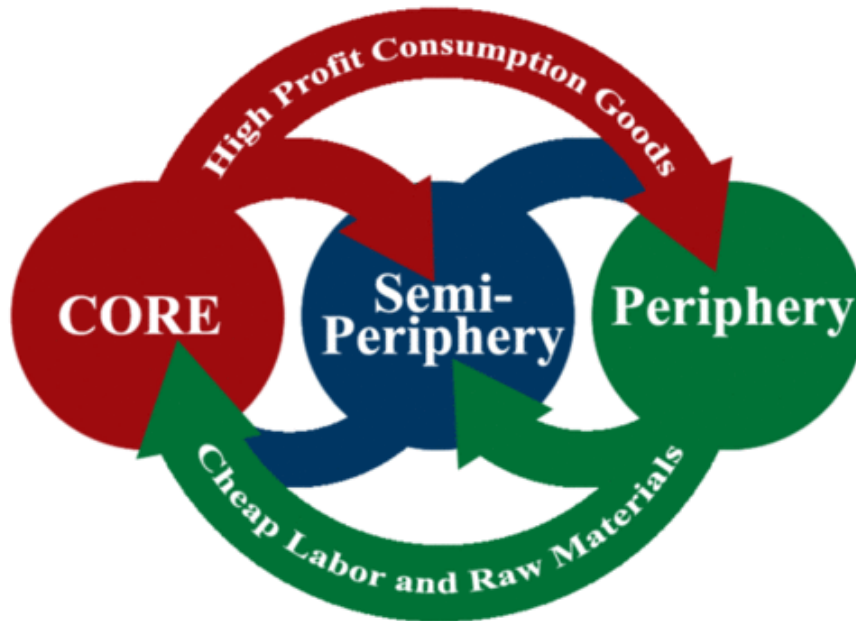
impacts of climate change. Thus, the present-day environmental crisis of climate change can be attributed to the combination of high levels of consumerist lifestyles driven by overdevelopment and the prevailing culture of capitalism.

On Consumption

Understanding the significant impact of consumption-driven behaviours due to capitalist culture on the current global environmental crisis of climate change becomes absolutely crucial. The prevailing cause of climate change can be primarily attributed to the pervasive influence of capitalism, which has led to overdevelopment, a voracious desire for material possessions, and a consumer culture. The culture of capitalism proves to be more than just an economic system; practically every element of our lives is significantly impacted by the way it operates. According to its theory, capitalism tries to "satisfy the needs of others by performing service efficiently" in addition to "striving for profits" (Robbins & Dowdy, 2019). Capitalism thus reigns because it serves, and one way it does this is by taking advantage of a consumerist culture. It is worth noting that our views, relationships, cultures, identities, and behaviours are eventually shaped by the prism of consumerism, which also has an impact on our society's culture and broader social structure (Robbins & Dowdy, 2019). Freud contended that the driving force behind consumer society was a frustrated yearning for completeness (Wilk, 2017).



According to consumerism, a person's level of personal consumption, particularly the acquisition of material possessions, has a big impact on how happy and content they are. The argument is not merely that happiness depends on a standard of living above a certain point but rather that spending money and material possessions are at the heart of pleasure (Erik Olin Wright & Rogers 2015). Within the fields of anthropology and economics, it is known that overconsumption of natural resources and the contemporary environmental crises are a direct result of the dominance of market-based systems and an excessive emphasis on continual economic growth due to the capitalist culture (Klemmer & McNamara, 2019). Consumerist culture and the unrelenting pursuit of consumer goods driven by capitalism place an immense strain on the environment's capacity to regenerate and replenish its resources. This, therefore, exacerbates climate change. The environmental problems that we feel today are the result of and embedded in intricate systems of production, consumption, influence, and practises that we must investigate from a variety of perspectives (Rau & Edmondson, 2022). For example, high levels of consumption and consumerism drive high demand for natural resources such as minerals, fossil fuels, timber, and water. The extraction and production processes required to meet this demand often lead to overexploitation and depletion of natural resources, which can resultantly disrupt ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, and negatively impact the overall functioning of ecosystems. I believe there exists a global environmental crisis, and high levels of consumption and consumerism due to overdevelopment and the culture of capitalism are major factors.



Wallerstein's World System Theory Model

Image retrieved from: <https://medium.com/@kendallgrace15/periphery-role-in-the-world-systems-theory-fa5d291cac55>

By adopting a world systems theory perspective, we can better understand how overdevelopment-driven high levels of consumerism and the dominant capitalism-based culture have contributed to an environmental crisis like climate change. Formulated by Wallerstein in 1974, is a Marxist framework that endeavours to clarify the economic basis of the contemporary capitalist world system. It is a theory that strives to explicate the dynamics of the "capitalist world economy" as a comprehensive social system (Martínez-Vela, 2001). The system is distinguished by the procurement of low-cost raw materials and labour from outlying regions. It asserts that central nations depend on the utilisation of resources from peripheral nations to sustain their economic progress. It is also commonly known as the "development of underdevelopment," coined by Andre Gunder Frank, as cited in Oliverio and Lauderdale (2015). The theory of world systems posits that the global economy is structured in a hierarchical manner, wherein core nations exert dominance over the periphery. The prevailing consensus is that core nations, distinguished by their industrialisation and prosperity, possess significant sway over worldwide economic mechanisms. Core countries have a well-established history of being the main contributors to the emission of greenhouse gases that lead to climate change and possess a comparatively greater capacity to manage and mitigate the impacts of climate change. According to Drew (2021), there is also a significant asymmetry in the discourse pertaining to the politics of climate change. The historical trend of core countries disproportionately extracting natural resources, particularly fossil fuels, has played a significant role in the acceleration of global warming and climate change. Moreover, these nations have employed a larger proportion of the planet's capability to assimilate and disperse thermal energy. Although periphery countries may exhibit lower individual carbon footprints, they are subject to a disproportionate burden from the adverse effects of climate change.

Developed and developing nations have different geographical and cultural characteristics, with peripheral countries prioritising labour-intensive production while the core countries focus on capital-intensive production. There is also a significant difference in CO₂ emissions between developed and developing countries. Core countries contribute more to the climate crisis due to the combination of high levels of consumerism driven by overdevelopment and the prevailing culture of capitalism, which has led to climate change. For example, the USA's CO₂ emissions surpass those of the entire African continent combined, while India's per capita CO₂ emissions are remarkably low, being only 1/19th of Canada's (Drew, 2021). Further, periphery countries often bear the brunt of the environmental impacts caused by the activities of core countries. This includes the displacement of communities due to resource extraction, pollution from industrial processes, and the loss of livelihoods due to climate-related disasters. According to Wilk (2017), if the distribution of wealth and consumer culture remains unequal, it could potentially lead to global conflict

or a permanent division among social classes, making the climate crisis not only environmental but also geopolitical. World systems theory underscores the need to address these injustices by promoting more equitable and sustainable global economic relationships. Since countries that occupy a central position in the global economy tend to produce higher levels of CO2 emissions, from the perspective of world systems theory, I believe that it is imperative that these countries take a greater responsibility in addressing the issue of climate change as compared to those countries or regions that are situated on the periphery.

Amazon rainforest, a case study:



Image retrieved from: <https://www.regnskoq.no/en/what-we-do/the-amazon>

As countries pursue industrialisation and economic advancement, they foster a culture of overconsumption, resulting in heightened production, the extraction of resources, and the generation of waste. The prevalent culture of capitalism and overdevelopment has resulted in high levels of consumption and consumerism, which in turn have fueled the demand for wood and paper products. Unfortunately, this has led to widespread deforestation. The significance of forests cannot be overstated, as they play a crucial role in carbon sequestration, habitat preservation, and cultural significance. The pursuit of economic growth and development under capitalism may come at the expense of safeguarding cultural and natural heritage, as short-term gains are often prioritised. The pursuit of economic interests usually results in the disregard or destruction of historic landmarks, culturally significant sites, and ecosystems with unique biodiversity. The loss of biodiversity not only affects the environment but also has negative impacts on cultural diversity and traditional practises among indigenous people. The exploitation of the Amazon rainforest by capitalist entities poses a significant threat to the integrity of the environment. The problem of land grabbing and concentration has emerged as a significant concern in recent times. The forced removal of indigenous communities from their traditional lands to accommodate industrial activities is a type of marginalisation that disturbs the symbiotic connection that these communities have historically shared with the forest. The act of displacement poses a severe threat to the indigenous communities, jeopardising not only their way of life but also their cultural heritage and their capacity to safeguard and preserve the rainforest. The act of deforestation not only results in the loss of habitats and a decline in biodiversity but also leads to the release of substantial amounts of carbon dioxide, which further worsens the current problem of climate change. The alarming rate of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest serves as an interesting case study for further exploring this concept.



According to a study conducted by Malhi et al. (2008), the Amazonian forests covered an extensive expanse of 5.4 million square kilometres in the year 2001. An estimated 837,000 square kilometres of Amazonian forests were found to have been cleared by the end of the year. It becomes evident that the pursuit of profit often outweighs the importance of preserving the environment in a capitalist system. The short-term gains prioritised by companies involved in deforestation have led to a disregard for the long-term consequences for the Amazon rainforest and the global community. During the 1990s, there was a significant gross rate of approximately 25,000 square kilometres per year; however, in 2007, Brazil witnessed a noteworthy decline in its deforestation rates, which plummeted by more than 50%. A number of interrelated variables, such as a drop in soy prices, a strengthening of the Brazilian real, and vigorous government action in Brazil, have been held accountable for the increase in deforestation rates in the rainforest. The annual rate of deforestation was estimated to be around 11,000 km². This serves as a striking illustration of how excessive consumer patterns can trigger an environmental crisis. Industries driven by capitalist motives tend to meet the growing demands of the societies and consumerist cultures embedded within them. The Amazon rainforest, being the most expansive tropical rainforest globally, experiences severe consequences due to deforestation, and these effects pose a threat to the sustenance of the planet and the livelihoods of indigenous communities. The prevailing economic framework, which places profit-driven capitalism and consumerism at the forefront, has resulted in an unsustainable depletion of natural resources. This has ultimately further exacerbated the impact of climate change, emphasising the urgent need for a transition towards more equitable and sustainable patterns of consumption.

Capitalism's focus on economic growth and development may additionally prioritise short-term gains over the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. Historic landmarks, culturally significant sites, and ecosystems with unique biodiversity may be overlooked or destroyed in the pursuit of economic interests. This loss erodes cultural diversity, disrupts traditional practises, and diminishes the connection between communities and their natural environments. The Amazon rainforest becomes a target for capitalist interests, both domestic and international, who aim to exploit its resources. This has resulted in concerning issues of land grabbing and concentration. Indigenous communities, which have traditionally coexisted with the forest in a mutually beneficial manner, are frequently subjected to marginalisation and displacement from their ancestral territories to accommodate industrial pursuits. The act of displacement poses a significant threat to the indigenous communities, as it not only disrupts their way of life but also jeopardises their cultural heritage and undermines their capacity to safeguard and preserve the

rainforest. The essential elements highlighted in the case study of the Amazon rainforest illustrates how consumerism, when influenced by capitalist culture, exacerbates resource depletion, waste production, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions while also affecting Indigenous communities. This then resultantly leads to the current environmental crisis, namely climate change. In my opinion, the incorporation of indigenous knowledge has the potential to provide unique and valuable insights into sustainable resource management, social equity, and environmental preservation especially pertaining to tackling the complex issues arising from climate change within the context of global economic systems.

Indigenous knowledge and climate change



According to Crate (2016), the cultural contexts in which people ascribe meaning and value to what they see and know frame their perceptions and knowledge systems. This can also pertain to their environments and consumption patterns. In a consumerist culture, there is always a need for the new and fast. This then means production and consumption patterns skyrocket, and natural resources are abused. Conversely, the cultures of indigenous peoples frequently exhibit a profound and spiritual bond with the natural world, acknowledging the interrelatedness and mutual reliance of all living entities. They prioritise sustainable resource consumption, recognising the importance of maintaining balance and harmony with the environment. This is driven by their traditional ecological knowledge and kincentric worldview, and I believe that by embracing indigenous perspectives, we can cultivate a deeper reverence for the natural world and implement sustainable practises that foster environmental health and mitigate the consequences of environmental crises like climate change. It is evident that environmental crises will soon become a central issue of social concern rather than remaining on the periphery; thus, the interdependence between human societies and the natural environment must be recognised as a crucial factor for the survival of our species (Klemmer and McNamara, 2019).

Indigenous Knowledge thus becomes important to consider. By definition, it refers to "the ecological and environmental knowledge held by place-based Indigenous peoples, accumulated over multiple generations within their particular cultural context and belief system " (Ban et al., 2018). This knowledge can inform us about the importance of maintaining biodiversity, practising regenerative agriculture, and utilising resources in a manner that ensures their long-term availability. The customs and ceremonies of indigenous societies frequently underscore the importance of acknowledging environmental boundaries and recognising the finite nature of resources. Their focus lies on prioritising necessities over desires and advocating for a mindset of contentment rather than indulgence in superfluous materialism. I contend that a more sustainable and conscientious way of life can be fostered by adopting this perspective. Furthermore, numerous studies have highlighted the significance of indigenous knowledge in the progress of agriculture and environmental conservation. The value of farmers' knowledge and experience in enhancing the resilience of rural livelihoods to climate variability and change is being increasingly acknowledged (Roncoli & Orlove, 2014). The Fourth Technical Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights the significance of indigenous knowledge systems in climate forecasting, adaptive management, and policy formulation. (Boko et al., 2018). Thus, integration of indigenous knowledge and its kincentric worldview may help slow down consumption and reduce our carbon footprint by promoting more sustainable practices which becomes crucial for mitigating global crises, namely climate change. So, by learning from the consumption patterns of indigenous people, we can cultivate a deeper understanding of sustainable practises, foster a greater respect for nature, and shift towards more mindful and balanced approaches to consumption, ultimately contributing to the preservation of our planet for future generations.

Conclusion

To conclude, the excessive pursuit of development, coupled with rampant consumerism and the pervasive influence of capitalist culture, have created alarming environmental challenges of unprecedented magnitude across the entire planet. The relentless pursuit of economic expansion and the insatiable thirst for materialistic gratification has exerted immense pressure on the delicate balance of ecosystems, depleted valuable resources, and posed an existential threat to the future of our planet. A comprehensive examination of the Amazon rainforest case study has effectively illuminated and brought to the forefront the effects of a consumerist culture and overdevelopment. The essay has also explored fundamental principles such as the world systems theory deeply embedded within the subject matter to further explain the pervasive influence of capitalism leading to climate change. Additionally, I have demonstrated the significance of adopting indigenous viewpoints, which can lead to the development of profound reverence for the environment and the implementation of sustainable measures that promote ecological well-being and alleviate the repercussions of environmental catastrophes such as climate change.

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