“Having children is one of the most destructive things you can do to the environment”: The politics of reproduction in the (m)Anthropocene[1]

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Introduction

The multifaceted effects of the climate crisis open up new pathways to explore how human bodies are treated, perceived, and impacted. A growing body of research investigates the intertwined relationship between the climate crisis and people’s reproductive choices. For instance, Krähenbühl (2022) has shown how "environmental childlessness" is informed by uncertainties about the future, ethical concerns, and persistent pronatalism, while also reflecting a broader rejection of capitalist lifestyles. At the same time, different climate change approaches continue to build on the population alarmism, fostering contemporary forms of population control (Hendrixson, Ojeda, Sasser, Nadimpally, Foley, & Bhatia, 2019). There has been an overwhelming promotion of individual choices and actions as ways to respond to the climate crisis in quantitative sustainability research, where restraining oneself from having (more) children has gotten a serious grip over the last years. It was clearly formulated and popularised by the study of Seth Wynes and Kimberly Nicholas called “*The climate mitigation gap: education and government recommendations miss the most effective individual actions*” (2017), where “have one fewer child” is placed as the most effective activity of the “Personal choices to reduce your contribution to climate change” chart.

Just a simple search for “one fewer child climate change” on the internet gives various media articles from 2017-2024 with headlines such as: “Having children is one of the most destructive things you can do to the environment, say researchers”[2], “More than 11,000 scientists have declared a ‘climate emergency.’ One of the best things we can do, they say, is have fewer children.”[3], “Children are expensive – not just for parents, but the environment – so how many is too many?”[4] and so on. Children, just like washing clothes in cold water, are now being measured in “emissions savings” (Wynes and Nicholas, 2017, p. 4). In this sense, “environmental childlessness” is being positioned as the most impactful activity of an environmentally friendly citizen, seemingly leaving reproduction to one’s individual decision. Yet such interests in peoples' reproductive activities politicise the human body and reproduction in a multitude of ways. They are part of the wider set of processes that restrict bodies, families and communities, that produce segmented and segregated spaces, that

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[2] Yahoo News, "Having Children Is One of the Most Destructive Things You Can Do to the Environment, Say Researchers," *Yahoo News UK*, July 12, 2017, https://uk.news.yahoo.com/having-children-one-most-destructive-172127595.html.
[3] Business Insider, "Scientists Declare a Climate Emergency and Say Solutions Include Having Fewer Children," *Business Insider*, November 5, 2019, https://www.businessinsider.com/scientists-declare-climate-emergency-solutions-fewer-children-2019-11.
[4] University of Arizona, "A New Conversation: Children Are Expensive – Not Just for Parents, but for the Environment. So How Many Are Too Many?" *University of Arizona News*, n.d., https://news.arizona.edu/employee-news/new-conversation-children-are-expensive-not-just-parents-environment-so-how-many-too.

determine whose lives are valuable and reproducible, and whose are not (Hendrixon, et. al., 2019, p.3).

While social science increasingly emphasizes the interplay between social contexts and the body, such environmental science discourses and practices work in the opposite direction: instrumentalizing and abstracting the body, reducing it to a malleable entity disconnected from its social and cultural fabric. Drawing on critical discourse analysis of the above mentioned research, I thus invite to politicise such a seemingly neutral and instrumental environmental solution as restraint from children and to denaturalise reproduction as a universal lifestyle choice that is by itself harmful for the environment. I also invite to critically explore the implications of reducing children – humans and human bodies – to a conglomeration of CO2 emissions, as well as opening up its gendered dimensions. This exploration is particularly relevant within the current environmental discourse – the so-called Anthropocene – under which such instrumentalisation and decontextualization not only persists but also reinforces environmental challenges.

“Want to fight climate change? Have fewer children”

In order to understand how “having fewer children” makes sense and the implications of its inscribed assumptions, I lean on a critical discourse analysis of the aforementioned environmental research which suggests that restraining from having (more) children is the most effective environmental act[5]. The idea of this alarming danger of newborn children is essentially built on (1) the claim that climate change is the result of greenhouse gas accumulation in the atmosphere (2) “which records the aggregation of billions of individual decisions” (Wynes and Nicholas, 2017, p. 1). This thus not only makes climate change a result of individual people, but also tightly links human body and human reproduction with environmental destruction.

The individualisation and commodification of environmental politics on different scales is far from new. It has become normal and legitimate to declare an individual action as contribution to or reduction of environmental damage. For example, the 1998 Human Development Report of the United Nations marked the first time that “a major institutional actor in the struggle for global environmental sustainability has made consumption a top policy priority” (Maniates, 2001, p.46). Thus it is no surprise that we find ourselves leaning on the “personal choices to reduce your contribution to climate change” charts, where among recycling, eating a plant-based diet and buying an electric car, researchers suggest having one fewer child to save up the maximum of one’s emissions. Many readers will perhaps be strongly familiar with the individual-focused discourse and commodified actions soaking up environmental politics, but the pervasiveness of this individual consumer choice model is worth emphasizing. It deeply informs cultural ideas about morality, individualism, and

[5] This mostly includes publications by Wynes and Nicholas with some additional material. For a detailed list see Rukaite (2020).

personal responsibility in many ways – "including how we think about reproduction and environmentalism" (Sasser, 2017, p. 6).

The researchers Wynes and Nicholas portray these lifestyle choices not only as widely available to most, but also as beneficial to the very individual. In the comparison with smoking, it is implied that such truth – the environmental necessity to make these lifestyle choices – is rather uncomfortable to hear, but the authors reassure that "*It is not a sacrifice message ... It is trying to find ways to live a good life in a way that leaves a good atmosphere for the planet. I've found it really positive to make many of these changes.*" (The Guardian article) In the FAQ's document, under the question of what personal contribution the authors make themselves, they share about their positive experiences in making the choices:

> „*Seth: I've personally enjoyed a more leisurely pace on a few trips by taking the train, getting work done with the train's wifi, and avoiding the hassle of security at the airport. I've never owned a car, and I do my best to eat a plant-based diet, although I will eat meat if it's about to be thrown out because I like to prevent food waste as well.*
>
> *Kim: ... I've cut my flying 80%, sold both my cars and moved to the center of my small city where I can bike to work, and gone meat-free. All of these choices have enhanced my quality of life.*" (FAQ's, p.12)

Whilst put in this way it does sound more like a privilege message, rather than a sacrifice one, as the accessibility by different people to enhance their quality of life like that remains an open question. Yet the construction of such a "climate-responsible individual" for any context creates social and moral pressure to adopt the ever-accelerating trends of eco-consumerism and green lifestyle choices (Appadurai, 2019). It is not simply potentially unavailable to most people, but is likely to infringe on other kinds of reproductive practices and understandings of care for the environment.

The logic of environmentally effective lifestyle choices is coupled with their calculability in GHG emissions. While climate change does essentially result from GHG accumulation in the atmosphere, there has been such a focus on carbon in the environmental discourses "that it has become removed from its environmental and social (and even climate) context" (Moolna, 2012, p.1). The used rhetoric by the researchers implies an active ability of the given choices to reduce emissions, with expressions such as "potential to reduce GHGs emissions", "are of substantial magnitude", "effective in reducing an individual's GHGs emissions", "make the biggest difference for the climate", and so on. The active element is especially exaggerated where having fewer children is called "fighting climate change" and having "by far the biggest ultimate impact".

The focus on carbon is part of a longer history of market-based environmental policies (Goodman and Boyd, 2011, p.104) and it is easily favoured by different actors "perhaps because it replaces the irreducible complexity of global climate dynamics" and also by businesses because "it allows the commodification essential to making climate tradable" (Moolna, 2012, p.1). In the analysed environmental science literature carbon now seems both to represent the ultimate enemy and to define a human. Further examples of the used language illustrate the construction of a literal connection between giving birth and emissions release:

> "*An individual planning the size of their family has control over the magnitude of potential emissions of their descendants ... in completely preventing these emissions from occurring, if they choose to not create those descendants in the first place ...*" (Reply to the 1st comment, p.2)

> "*However, regardless of methodology used, we are convinced ... that having one fewer child is the most substantial action that most individuals can take to make a quantifiable reduction in personal carbon emissions.*" (Reply to the 1st comment, p.2)

> "*Having one fewer child will save 58.6 tonnes of CO2-equivalent per year*" (The Guardian article)

Not only then an unborn child is made comparable to "684 teenagers who choose to adopt comprehensive recycling for the rest of their lives" (The main article, p. 3), but it also actively fights climate change by not producing 58.6 tonnes of CO2 yearly. Counting children in emissions (savings) objectifies them even further than becoming a lifestyle choice – they are treated both as a conglomeration of gas and accumulation of purchasing choices, making childbearing detached from its biological and social essence.

The reduction of children to emissions is even better conveyed in the article by Murtaugh and Schlax (2009), which Wynes and Nicholas relied on for their own calculations. This article introduces the concept of "genetic units," linking a parent's carbon legacy to their descendants' emissions. The essential idea is that "a person is responsible for the carbon emissions of his descendants, weighted by their relatedness to him" (Murtaugh and Schlax, 2009, p. 14), which makes each parent responsible for ½ of the emissions of their children, and ¼ of the emissions of their grandchildren. These relatedness weights are nearly made genetic in a way that "the fractional genetic unit represented by a particular descendant can be thought of as the proportion of the ancestor's genes ... that are shared with the descendant, or the "percentage of blood" that the two have in common" (ibid.). This framing implies a hereditary transmission of carbon responsibility, intertwining biological lineage with environmental accountability.

The goal of the latter study, the authors claim, was "to quantify the consequences of the childbearing decisions of an individual" (Murtaugh and Schlax, 2009, p.15), because:

> "*Clearly, an individual's* ***reproductive choices can have a dramatic effect on the total carbon emissions ultimately attributable to his or her genetic lineage****. ... ignoring the consequences of reproduction can lead to serious underestimation of an individual's long-term impact on the global environment.*" (Murtaugh and Schlax, 2009, p.18).

Thus here, the amount of CO_2 an unborn child "saves" is calculated based on the lifestyle patterns of their parents (and grandparents), which both reduces children to a conglomeration of their parent's daily (consumption) activities and makes parents inherently responsible for their children's lifestyles. It thus suggests a human concept which treats him or her as cumulative carbon footprints of their progenitors, making the "consequences of reproduction", i. e. humans, potentially extremely disastrous for "the global environment".

Importantly, such reductive calculations are claimed to be merely scientific, value neutral accounts of reality. Statements that the authors in question are here to help us, and that it is their job to report the data to us, come up in all the analysed documents, but in the mainstream media article is expressed particularly well, as Kimberly Nicholas is quoted:

> "***It is our job as scientists to honestly report the data****. Like a doctor who sees the patient is in poor health and might not like the message 'smoking is bad for you', we are forced to confront the fact that current emission levels are really bad for the planet and human society*." (The Guardian article)

In their public reply to criticism, the authors are thankful for the ability "to clarify" their position on what they call a sensitive topic of family planning:

> "*We do not by any means wish for our results to be used as justification to infringe on anyone's rights to family planning*" (p. 2)

> "*We agree that family planning can be a sensitive ethical issue*" (p. 2).

Despite their best efforts, though, "*there were some media reports that interpreted our findings in ways we did not intend. But we believe we were clear about our own ethical stances when communicating with the media*" (p. 3). They carry on giving examples on what sort of ethical stances they have in mind. The general emphasis of these widely communicated messages is that having a child is a very personal decision, yet it is followed by: "Certainly it's not my place as a scientist to dictate choices for other people. **But it is my place to do the analysis and report it fairly**" (Reply to the 2nd comment, p.3). Science here is used not only to legitimize the claims, but to deliberately minimize controversy (Sasser, 2017, p.6) of implicitly "dictating choices for other people".

Whilst claiming to simply report the data, it evidently evokes guilt and moral obligation to follow the most effective environmental lifestyle choices. In the FAQ document accompanying their study, under the question, "What can I do as an individual?" the authors note hearing from individuals who feel inspired to act "now that they know these choices really count for the climate" (FAQ's, p.10). They provide an illustrative example:

> "*A new mother in Sweden wrote: '****We became parents 3 weeks ago and we are trying our best to cut down on our carbon emissions****. Thank you for the graphics. I'll put them on our refrigerator so I'll make sure we're reminded every day.*'" (FAQ's, p.10)

The message conveys a moral obligation to reduce emissions through lifestyle adjustments, but *especially so for new parents*. The framing implies heightened responsibility for mothers, reinforcing the narrative that giving birth requires compensatory environmental action. This not only illustrates how reproduction is politicized but also intensifies the moral weight placed on parenting, particularly motherhood, within climate discourse.

Ultimately, this analysed environmental logic underscores a radical instrumentalization of the human body, reducing reproduction to a calculus of carbon and detaching it from its broader human, social, and cultural contexts. Scientific discourse, cloaked in neutrality, legitimizes these reductions while minimizing controversy, neglects structural inequalities in reproductive agency, and obscures the social, economic and gendered realities shaping reproduction. MacGregor (2010) argues that climate change is frequently constructed as a gender-neutral problem, masking its disproportionate impacts on women and their reproductive roles. Even when promoting childlessness, the ideological underpinnings of these scientific narratives reflect control over female bodies, reinforcing historical (patriarchal) patterns of gendered regulation. Reproduction thus must be understood within its full spectrum of social, political, and cultural dimensions, resisting reductive narratives that frame childbearing and humans as a mere environmental burden.

Historical contexts of the politics of reproduction

Reproduction has long been a political arena, inseparable from different state, capital and other interests and influences. It is arguably made possible as an object of study and intervention through "the power relations governing knowledge production, surveillance, and management of populations and bodies" (Sasser, 2017, p. 16). Departing from scientific texts as powerful forms of knowledge, I hold that it is essential to look into "the social and political contexts within which scientific knowledge is produced, and within which it continues to be deeply entangled" (ibid., p. 17). Environmental discourses often construct the issue of "population" as a scientific, gender neutral problem, thus obscuring significant gendered dimensions of it (MacGregor, 2010, p. 224). Along with scholars of women's history, I hold that state (patriarchal) control over reproduction is in various ways important for the maintenance of a dominant class and gender structure (Diduck, 1993, p. 467). Such control can (and does) take the form of "ideological and legislative imperatives" which require specific women's role in society, often that of bearers and rearers of "fit" children (ibid.).

Concerns about human population numbers and the ways and rates at which women give birth are not self-evident. With the instrumentalization of human bodies in climate crisis discourses, as outlined above, it becomes crucial to examine how bodies and reproduction are framed as public territory — something *our common good* depends on and therefore subject to control. While the female role may be redefined through the promotion of *restraint* in bearing children, it is notable that these scientific narratives on reproduction often carry ideological imperatives directed at women.

There are historical developments that show different interests in population yet maintain a similar axis – women more often than not are positioned as birth givers which *our common good* depends on. For example, tracing it back to the birth of capitalism and 16th and 17th century witch-hunts, Federici (2014) argues that by losing access to the commons and by the naturalization of their work as a natural resource outside of market relations, *women themselves became the commons*. This encourages to think about reproduction under capitalist relations as a very specific historical creation, having in mind that many associations that we have regarding it, however contradictory, are ideologically contingent on this history. Importantly, witch-hunts were largely led by European governments imposing the severest penalties against contraception, abortion and infanticide – a literal demonization of any form of birth-control and non-procreative sexuality took place. This, according to the author (Federici, 2014, p. 88), marked "the beginning of demographic recording and the intervention of the state in the supervision of sexuality, procreation, and family life". The outcome of these policies was therefore such that wombs became public territory controlled by men and the state (ibid., p. 89).

The authors of environmental research do not suggest any female subordination, do not insinuate any female role in society and anything similar of that sort (especially as they do not mention females (nor males) at all). But my suggestion here is that "individual lifestyle choice" to have more or less children (as opposed to the more controversial household "duty" to reproduce) is an interest to regulate reproduction, which does not alter gendered divisions of labor or the social relations of production and reproduction (Katz, 2001, p. 712), but is implicitly built on them and thus carries similar implications. At the time of the capitalist take-off, when physical labor was the primary means of production, "the state had to resort to regulation and coercion to expand or reduce the work-force" (Federici, 2014, p. 91), but even down to the present, it spares no efforts to determine which children should be born, where, when, or in what numbers (ibid.).

Sexual behavior and procreation under state-rule has taken different forms and purposes, especially with the formation of population as a more bounded area of inquiry, susceptible for and even in need of state-management. The 17th century was characterized by contrasting views regarding population, among which was both the fear of the proliferation of poverty and the explicit idea that large populations were a necessary source of labor for the state (Sasser, 2017, p. 52). Since around 18th century, there was a high interest in reproduction by powerful figures and groups "that saw themselves as guardians of the interests of the nation/state" (Jordanova, 1995, p.376), and whose efforts showed "attempts to construct the psychic significance of reproduction" (ibid.) These ideas show how population control was justified and normalized, and reveal normative accounts on reproduction as serving some greater purpose.

Population as a bounded area of inquiry to be regulated for the interest of common good came to fruition with the help of Thomas Malthus and his "law of population", and it came together with specific interest in birth. Malthus famously claimed that "... population, when unchecked, increased in a geometrical ratio, and subsistence for man in an arithmetical ratio" (Malthus, 1998[1798], p.6), thus influentially establishing a direct, mathematical link between population size and the exhaustion of resources, i.e. degrading environment. Ever since population was perceived as a bounded subject of inquiry, it was situated within questions of state and territory governance, international security, and the search for an optimal balance of resources to meet the basic needs of members of society (Sasser, 2017, p. 51), which were all efforts "to identify the basic blueprint of the ideal state" (ibid., p. 52). Thus, ideas about population and its management of any kind are tightly linked with state's interest, the power of which has historically always in some form depended on defining normative families (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1991, p. 314).

For earliest liberals (namely, Hobbes and Locke) childbirth was rather something that simply occurred, yet in 18th-19th century liberal thought, birth became something that should be regulated or at least managed (Ruhl, 2002, p. 647). Both Malthus and Smith (the "father of economics") were concerned with the profligate waste of resources through high infant mortality rates on the one hand, and the proliferation of pauperism, on the other. They were thus both drawn into discussions about how to limit and plan births (ibid.). The natural limits of population growth, namely, starvation and death, were theorized as encouraging humankind to reach its highest moral and social potential through hard work and responsibility. State intervention to improve the welfare of the poor was considered unnecessary and even as disrupting nature's intention to keep human growth and food resources in balance, while making the poor contribute effectively to society through hard work (Sasser, 2017, p. 53).

The impact of Malthusian theory can hardly be overestimated. It irrevocably influenced the development of scientific thinking and directly shaped the expansion of scientific theories and methods in eugenics, demography, and, not the least, ecological theory of carrying capacity (Sasser, 2017, p. 53). The latter was an important pillar relating population to environmentalism. The proliferation of Earth's carrying capacity culminated in the Club of Rome-commissioned project, "The Limits to Growth" (1972). This book produced a series of computer-generated models, projecting how "exponential growth of population, food production, and consumption patterns would interact with resources" (Sasser, 2017, p. 76). Predictably, the models indicated the eventual overshoot of available resources by a growing population, leading to the Club's famous conclusion that "human population growth and resource use far exceed the carrying capacity of the earth's finite resources" (ibid.). Carrying capacity became fully embedded in population sciences and provided them with the appearance of objectivity, rationality, and precision to policies that might have otherwise seemed politically or economically motivated (ibid., p. 68).

Population statistics accelerated the molding of reproduction into a governable area – reproductive practices, particularly of the working classes, were made into an object open to change (Sasser, 2017, p. 59, citing Greene, 1999). Procreation, previously understood to be natural, was now reframed as governable, "something that could be artificially regulated through study and intervention" (ibid.). Human population growth as a major threat to the planet has seen major revival within the environmental crisis debates (Sasser, 2018; Dyett and Thomas, 2019). While blaming human numbers for everything from "deforestation to air pollution, global poverty, civil unrest, international migration, and now climate change" (ibid.), neo-Malthusian proponents continue to posit these problems as a natural function and result of human population growth (Sasser, 2017, p. 2) and highly favour the idea of preventive birth control not through coercion, but through voluntary access (ibid., p. 20). Neo-Malthusian rhetoric has continuously adopted hegemonic discourses "subtly laced with racist and sexist undertones" (Dyett and Thomas, 2019, p. 206) as they most often make "women of color in the Global South the agent primarily responsible for changing our present reality, subtly implying that they share a considerable part of the blame" (Dyett and Thomas, 2019, p. 218).

Most importantly for this work, the pervasiveness of "the law of population" and earth's limits naturalized the idea that populations should be managed, which implies that reproductive practices should, too. Linking „having children" to climate destruction implicitly conceals the complex network of histories and contexts as it "places women's individual reproductive lives in global context" and thus is never individual, never free from duty to reproduce responsibly (Sasser, 2017, p.3).

Reproduction in the (m)Anthropocene

I essentially suggest that the above outlined depoliticisation and instrumentalisation of reproduction is part of the politics of reproduction as it goes hand in hand with the discourse around the defining notion of our times – the Anthropocene. In 2002, when the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen published his famous piece on "The Geology of Mankind" and the Anthropocene was popularized, it was simultaneously tied with the "latter part of the eighteenth century", which also happened to coincide with the design of the steam engine by James Watt (Crutzen, 2002, p. 23). In the article called "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?" Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill (2007, p. 616) proposed that "atmospheric CO2 concentration can be used as a single, simple indicator to track the progressions of the Anthropocene". This again essentially defined human species by the overall level of CO2 in the atmosphere. Human nature in this sense became tied to CO2 and, simultaneously, with inherently destructive effects.

With the catastrophic prognosis for the Anthropocene's future making, humanity's temporal, ontological, and epistemological essence becomes uncertain (Hamilton, 2017, p. 580). Tying humans with destructiveness and positioning the body as an emitter in the human-dominated era thus forms quite a paradox: "an existential discontinuity, in which humanity must secure itself in the future from itself in the present" (ibid.). This is reflected in the environmental research analysed above, as people are suggested to have less children for the future generations:

> "*Enabling kids to grow up in a safe climate is a huge incentive to reduce overall national emissions to sustainable levels ....*" (Reply to the 2nd comment, p.3).

> "*Many individuals ... want to know which of their personal choices make the biggest difference for the climate. This includes many parents who want to pass on a better, safer world to their children, ...*" (FAQ's, p.1)

Human ability to transform nature, resulting in an exponential growth of human freedom and power, seems to have been translated into the destabilization of the very framework of life, that is, a limitation of human freedom (Cunha, 2015, p. 65). Human species thus seems to subsume the world, making itself simultaneously an object and a subject of security (Hamilton, 2017, p. 580). Yet to reduce humans to a violating tendency or an inevitably harmful collective force "is to misrepresent a minority as all of humanity, and to identify ideologies of domination and disregard for nature as paradigmatic and definitive of all humanity" (Cuomo, 2017, p. 2). One among the main issues of upgrading Homo sapiens into a geological agent by carbon dioxide (Malm, 2016, p. 27), is that such universal-species geological agency cannot be attributed to humanity as a whole by definition, since historically "climate change has come about because a fortune few have appropriated the bulk of the atmospheric carbon sink through massive emissions" (ibid., p. 390).

Scholars of women's history long argued that discourses of law, medicine, science and technology are embedded in a construction of pregnancy and reproduction which comes from an outside, male standpoint (Diduck, 1993, p. 471). Within this new geological era, it is claimed that mankind has punted the planet out of 10,000 years of relative stability, and that the universal human holds the responsibility of the deepening crisis (Di Chiro, 2017, p. 488). Yet the Anthropocene was not created equally, many authors note, but made "by a specific subset of humans, namely, those on the frontlines of modernization: white, wealthy, rich males of European heritage" (Dyett and Thomas, 2019, p. 219). Moreover, for most of the time, primary spokespersons, decision makers, and pontificators in spheres of climate science, economics, and politics have mostly been white, upper class men, and the members of The Anthropocene Working Group were no exception (Di Chiro, 2017, p. 488). This raises questions not only about whether this notion is productive, but also whether it is not itself a continuation of a particular (patriarchal) world order. That is why some authors use the term (m)Anthropocene, which refers to a "gendered, racialized, and exploitative global capitalist system that is driving ecological and climatological destruction" (ibid.).

Ecofeminist perspectives have long accentuated the connection between "the domination and oppression of women [and] the rampant exploitation of nature through masculin[ist] methods and attitudes" (as cited in Kitsch, 2023, in Sarkar, 2022). *Masculinist* is a widely used term that refers to methods, attitudes and practices supporting male dominance, involving competition, hierarchy, territorialism, confrontation, monopolisation, domination (Kitch, 2023), associated with the drivers of climate change. Attitudes, assumptions and values that create gender hierarchies and oppression (and are endemic to patriarchy) reflect the driving forces that threaten ecological systems and human survival. To this day, patriarchal worldview can be seen as foundational to the extractive and exploitative attitudes and practices regarding different people, land and natural resources (Kitch, 2023, p. 3).

This complicates the Anthropocene as an appropriate descriptor, as not all humans (and most definitely not all men either) have driven the social and industrial systems degrading the geochemical systems of the earth (Kitch, 2023, p. 3). Although the notion of the Anthropocene is supposed to describe the crisis, it attributes capitalist and militarist impacts to humanity as a species (Cuomo, 2017, p. 2) and thus instead contributes to naturalizing the world order that "solidified in the nineteenth century", and to rationalizing the consequences of the world economy as normal, expectable and natural (Hornborg, 2016, pp. 3-4).

Gender has been accentuated as the most significant factor in the struggles regarding resources, environmental change and knowledges (Mollet, 2017). Its significance is evident across many areas, ranging from the division and unequal valuation of labor, household decision-making practices, to postcolonial development projects, racial categorisations and industrial development (utilizing extracted minerals and fossil fuels) (Mollet, 2017; Kitch, 2023). Since the very framework of life in the Anthropocene is destabilized, and the biggest threat to it is the human species, it is fair to expect an increase of interest in the right kinds of "person's reproductive choices". The (m)Anthropocene implicitly gives females a special role – their wombs become a determinate factor of our bright future, as they voluntarily not give birth to CO_2.

Conclusions

Drawing on critical discourse analysis, I aimed to show that "have one fewer child" is constructed as logical through a combination of these main pillars: 1) individualization and commodification of environmentalism, which allows to consider individual lifestyle choices as important contributions to fighting climate change, and simultaneously places responsibility for the cause of climate change on individual actions; 2) neo-Malthusian assumption that no matter how we look at it, human numbers will continue to multiply emissions which we urgently need much less of; and 3) de-politization and commodification of carbon emissions, which allow for a cold calculus of an unborn child in emissions savings (and a newborn child as emissions release).

To further unravel the implications of this narrative, I drew on some historical and political arguments regarding the subordinate nature of reproduction to females in capitalism and the "science-led" state (and environmental) interests in childbearing. I suggested that a gender-neutral scientific intention to regulate childbearing (through evoking guilt and constructing moral obligation), not only ignores the patriarchal history of reproduction within capitalism, but also legitimizes the gendered, racialised and exploitative setting which this history has created.

I thus argue that "environmentally friendly restraint" from children is neither individual nor gender-neutral, as it implies that female bodies and sexual life should serve our common good and are in need of management. In the analysed case, it implicitly places (female) sexuality and female body as CO_2 emitters and thus a threat to our planet, in turn asking for supervision. Given the complex history and contexts of how this actually comes about, it holds implications particularly for female bodies because they are largely turned to be more directly responsible for the climate crisis by giving birth, and are more prone to be subject for subordination under the patriarchal, *masculinist* dominance.

Conflating a newborn child with planetary destruction in a way redefines the very human and the human body as it is perceived in a radically instrumental way, through a calculus of CO2 emissions of one's purchasing choices. It also essentially alters the understanding of the parent-child relationship as it has now become best described through CO2. Environmentally responsible individual is constructed, though, as voluntarily choosing which lifestyle purchases to make to reduce carbon emissions. The lack of responsibility of such individuals is reflected in the name of our new geological era – the Anthropocene, which conceals the very historic, structural, and contextual roots of the current crisis.

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