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Catch23:

A Postcolonial Reflection on Climate Justice

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Abstract

This year's United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) will focus on the perspective of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the issue of climate justice. This paper examines the relationship between environment and colonialism and argues that contemporary colonialism is still being reflected in today's battle for climate justice. By evaluating the developed world's attitudes towards solutions for combating global warming issues, we argue that the Global South and the Indigenous Peoples are more vulnerable and disproportionately more affected by the impacts of climate change and how these are examples of environmental colonialism.

This paper is part of an interactive project taking place at the "Conference Of the Youth" (COY13) in Bonn on 02.11. - 04.11.17. COY13 is a key preparatory event for YOUNGO members participating in this year's UNFCCC COP23 climate negotiations held in Bonn.

Introduction

Global warming affects everyone, but does it really affect everyone in the same way? Climate change and its impacts have a differentiated effect on humans and their surroundings: poor countries and communities with poor economies; weak political structures and rapid demographic changes already severely suffer and the struggle means, a struggle for survival. Although climate change is being discussed as a global issue within the arena of international climate change politics, in reality, global inequalities still shape the division of a common habitat (Brunnengräber and Dietz 2008). “Climate justice puts climate change and climate action in the broader social and environmental context. This includes aspects such as intergenerational equity, gender, human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples. Climate justice also recognizes the responsibilities of the Global North due to their historic emissions“ (COY 2017). Colonialism is “the practice of one nation using its political powers over another nation by occupying and exploiting the other nation’s territories” (English Oxford Dictionary 2017). Starting in the 17th century with the discovery of “new worlds” and the settlement colonialism, the Indigenous Peoples communities were destroyed and their lands exploited for the benefit of the “white peoples”. During the industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Global North became wealthier and stronger through industrialization, while the other countries and marginalized communities became weaker and failed to undergo the process of industrial development. In contrast, the colonised countries were exploited by their natural resources and territory. The loss of land, constrained governmental regimes and lack of respect for tradition and culture define colonialism. The research project examines the relationship between environment and colonialism and argues that contemporary colonialism can still be found in today’s battle for climate justice. By evaluating the developed world’s attitudes towards solutions for combatting global warming issues, we argue that the Global South and the Indigenous Peoples are more vulnerable and disproportionately more affected by the impacts of climate change and how these are examples of environmental colonialism.

This year’s United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) will focus on the perspective of small island developing states and the issue of climate justice. Catch23 is an interactive programme contribution to the “Conference Of the Youth 13” (COY13), which is a key preparatory event for YOUNGO¹ members participating in this year’s COP23 climate negotiations held in Bonn. The project was

¹ YOUNGO is the UNFCCC observer constituency of youth non-governmental organizations. It has received the provisional status as an observer constituency at COP15 in 2009 and could henceforth actively represent youth in meetings with officials or in climate negotiations.

submitted in August 2017 and was chosen out of hundreds programme contributions to be presented at COY13.

The Project

With this interactive project, we aim to create space for reflection and expression, opening up questions and delivering a unique contribution representing the voice of the youth at COP23. We want to establish a discourse about postcolonialism within the context of climate change mitigation and adaptation. By collecting perspectives (audio and written) on climate justice during COY13 and by presenting the final materials to YOUNGO, we want to demonstrate the urgency of solving global inequalities and therefore climate injustice.

Visual and audio material about environmental colonialism will be, as part of “Catch23”, presented at our infobooth on the 3rd of November 2017. By collecting recorded and written material from each participant, we hope to create a thought-provoking space with room for reflection. All gathered recordings will be put together to a single track and be given to a YOUNGO spokesperson. In addition, they will be made available to the public via our webpage with the intention of inspiring new ideas and projects.

The Title: Catch23

The title “Catch23” – deriving from the English expression “catch 22” – was chosen with the idea of relating it to the process of the fight for climate justice and that justice cannot be reached if postcolonial inequalities remain. A paradox which has been addressed, but can still be noticed within the arena of climate justice politics. The number “23” was chosen as it will be the 23rd Conference of the Parties (COP).

Creating Space for Reflection

Audio and written material for participants will be provided with the aim of creating space for reflection. The written material consists of short essays written by us on the topic of environmental colonialism and climate justice – *The North-South Impasse* and *The Forgotten Indigenous Peoples*. The audio material shown at our stand is a compilation of recordings of the crowd taken during COP21 in Paris in November 2015. Project participant’s views, thoughts, statements and discussions taken during COY13 will be added to this recording. The material serves as a platform for an open and collective reflection on environmental colonialism and gives opportunity to starting an active dialogue between youths from all over the world.

In order to stimulate new ideas and create debates, all given statements will be uploaded to our online platform and publicly shared so that participants are given the possibility to listen to previous recordings and therefore, gain insight into different views, opinions and feelings concerning climate justice. Further, open questions which will be handed out at the event providing additional food for thought.

With “Catch23”, we want to create a safe space for dialogue and promote freedom of speech for all participants. These concepts are very important for the project; we want to decolonize society’s conventional approach. Therefore, participants are welcome to express themselves in any language and given the choice of staying anonymous.

The Website

A [website](#) has been created, serving as a platform for knowledge exchange. All recordings will be uploaded in real-time during the conference.

Website: <https://catch23web.wordpress.com/>

Inspiration for Reflection

The Audio Material

The compilation of recordings taken during COP21 in Paris in November 2015 served as main inspiration for our project. The power of these voices gave us the motivation to start a discourse about environmental colonialism and climate justice.

The link to the [audio track](#) can be found on our project website or be directly listened here: <https://soundcloud.com/marie-198853810>

The Written Material

These short essays² are a mixture of academic research and our own objective perspectives on environmental colonialism.

² The length of the essays will be adapted for the presentation during the COY13, full texts will be available on the webpage.

THE NORTH-SOUTH IMPASSE

1. Common but Differentiated Responsibilities

In the colonial past, the Global North practiced economical and cultural exploitation of the people of the 'Third World' while at the same time blaming them of being backward (Kerala 1991). Nowadays, the same scenario can be witnessed within the framework of international climate politics. From the perspectives of the developing countries, the Global North had been polluting the atmosphere and degrading the environment through industrialisation over the last two centuries and should therefore take responsibility for their historic contributions towards the anthropocene-induced climate change (Brunnengräber and Dietz 2008). 20% of the industrialized countries account for 60% of the global overall CO₂ emissions, thus, they are the main polluter. Furthermore, per capita CO₂ emissions in the Global South are much lower than in the Global North, e.g. one U.S. citizen accounts for an 8th-fold of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere compared to that of a Chinese citizen and a 20th-fold of that of an Indian citizen (Roberts 2001). The developing countries, whose priority is to ensure economic growth in order to meet the basic needs for their people, demand consensus from the industrialized world. In contrast, the rich countries refuse to cut down on their own emissions unless poor nations did the same. According to Rajami (2000), "since its inception, the climate negotiations have witnessed intense bickering between and within the industrial and developing world over who should take responsibility, in what measure, and under what conditions, to avert climate change". Also, Roberts and Parks (2008) argue that the north-south impasse is "unlikely to be resolved in the absence of aggressive efforts to address issues of inequality and justice".

2. Climate Change Mitigation

Technology Transfer

The debate around historical responsibilities within the context of global warming also raises the question about climate change mitigation. For decades, climate change adaptation had not received much attention but instead, climate change negotiations focused mainly on greenhouse gas emission reductions (Roberts 2001). In principle, climate change mitigation comprises all means of adaptation, which help prevent the constraint of the individual and collective livelihoods by the impacts of the anthropocene-induced climate change (Brunnengräber und Dietz 2008). Countries which have least contributed towards global warming lack the financial means in order to prepare for and adapt to the impacts of extreme

weather events. According to the Paris Agreement, in order to avoid developing countries undertaking a “dirty” industrialisation and therefore making the same mistake as the Global North, the rich industrialized countries are expected to help the poorer developing countries of the Global South by advancing sustainable development through technology transfer, such as renewable energy technology and sustainable production methods (Brunnengräber und Dietz 2008). However, in reality most “clean” technologies are being produced by and for the industrialized countries and new production methods cannot be implemented in the rapidly growing countries due to a lack of financial means or knowledge (Perkins 2003). In order to increase capacities for climate change adaptation, governmental interventions e.g. financial subventions for the inclusion of new technologies are required (ibid.).

Knowledge Transfer

The current international debate about a global future sustainable economy not only demands a technology transfer but also a knowledge transfer and a transfer of know-how both within the industrialized countries and the developing countries. Whereas some of the countries of the Global South (e.g. China) have managed to achieve strengthening “green” capacities and therefore start a sustainable diffusion, most of the poor countries of the developing world struggle to establish strategies and the infrastructure necessary for combating the impacts of climate change (Fu and Zhang 2001). Innovation and capacity-building are cost-intensive and risky but, at the same time, advance economic growth. However, due to the lack of human capital and financial resources, economic growth is hindered (ibid.).

Know-how’ comprises not only the introduction of new “green” technologies, the transfer of patents, but also the necessity of taking into account existing “indigenous” production methods. In general, local employees who utilise conventional production methods, do not possess specialised qualifications and capacities, which are needed for modern methods - often new technologies are being engineered in the Global North (Aitken and Stiglitz 1969). Thus, a sustainable knowledge- and information mobilization requires institutional strengthening, e.g. new universities, schools and the expansion of information networks. According to Fu and Zhang (2011), an effective knowledge transfer increases “know-how”, creates space for innovation and motivates to further investment in green and “clean” technologies so that the use of “dirty” technologies would gradually get priced-out of the market.

Moreover, technological diffusion enables independent resource management and energy independency for developing countries (Okereke 2010).

Political Participation

Global inequalities are omnipresent - the poor countries of the Global South demand more power in influencing multilateral political discussions. The aim of international climate conventions is to support common action towards climate change and its impacts within the framework of multilateral climate politics. With the help of an accord, the fight against anthropocene-induced climate change and its impacts is to be strengthened and climate change adaptation stabilised (Rajamani 2000). However, disparities between the developed - more dominant, and the developing - more vulnerable, world still exist. For example, due to the lack of financial means and human capital such as expertise and advocacy, poor countries are usually forced to represent their country with fewer delegates. Further, important decisions are often being made during separate meetings or in so-called “green rooms” and therefore, countries of the Global South experience decision-making from an observational point of view rather than as being part of strategic diplomacy. (Mekina 2015).

Brunnengräber und Dietz (2008) argue, that political marginalization within the framework of international and national political participation, it is to allow for and create equal opportunities for social agents of the Global South so that their voices can be heard and their needs, rights and aspirations be reflected within the outcomes.

THE FORGOTTEN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The definition of settler colonialism includes the attempt to erase Indigenous Peoples from their lands, destroying their community system for the benefit of the colony with the implementation of its own system (Whyte 2016). The “containment” of Indigenous Peoples into reserves appeared to be a one of the good way to achieve their purposes. Once the inhabitant of the “new lands” are confined in a small part of the territory, there is no more obstacles to the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, the emergence of carbon-intensive economic activities and forest destruction - all are practices that are now responsible for climate change. Some Indigenous Peoples are kept oppressed by their governing states, which limits their adaptation capabilities and silences their voices (Brugnach 2017, Whyte 2016). Climate change is an important concern for Indigenous Peoples whose are not responsible for it. It can even be argued that climate change is happening as a result from of the colonialists’ activities. This is climate injustice (Whyte 2016).

Since there is still some discrimination of Indigenous Peoples within most States and they have no direct voice in most of the international institutions in the actual “State-centric” system (Ford and al. 2016), they cannot participate at the international community activities, nor be directly involved in climate change negotiations. However, global warming is a global

issue which has to be discussed at the global level, but which at the same time requires local action and knowledge from all communities.

1. Context: Climate Change

Indigenous Peoples are important stakeholders both in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Due to poverty, their strong dependence on the ecosystem and their limited capabilities to adapt to the impacts of climate change, these communities are often in more vulnerable situations. On the other hand, their knowledge and their lifestyles are important inputs to concerning climate change mitigation (Brugnach 2017, DPLF and OXFAM 2015, Tauli-Corpuz and Lynge 2008, Whyte 2016).

Vulnerability

Due to historical discrimination, violation of their rights on their ancestral lands, the lack of access to public services and the marginalization within the state, indigenous communities often suffer from poverty situations (DPLF and OXFAM 2015). Their lands are targeted for exploitation activities, while some big companies take advantage of their vulnerability by manipulating them with bribing (Brugnach 2017, DPLF and OXFAM 2015, Miranda 2012). However, the deals are unfair and the inequalities keep growing.

The exposure of Indigenous Peoples to the consequences of climate change should be seen with a more holistic perspective (Whyte 2016). It is not just another element which increases their vulnerability and therefore makes them less resilient to climate change. As demonstrated by Whyte (2016), settlement colonialism has affected the Shishmaref community in Alaska in a way that they cannot adapt themselves in the same way as before to the occurring rapid environmental changes. Their mobility and the flexibility of their political system have been altered; and now, the sedentarisation and settlement of their institutions and infrastructure makes them less resilient to the environmental crisis that they face. For this community, their vulnerability is directly related to colonial decisions that were made in order to foster carbon-intensive activities areas which are within the realms of climate change. Therefore, they are now less resilient to rapid changes happening in their environment (ibid.).

Mitigation

Indigenous Peoples are also playing a key role in climate change mitigation. In most of the communities, the methods of production and consumption are “carbon-neutral, or even carbon-negative” and demonstrate examples of sustainable lifestyles (Tauli-Corpuz and Lynge 2008). Among others, their agricultural knowledge is a source of environmentally-friendly

practices and solutions. Furthermore, many indigenous activists are environmental protectors, fighting for the protection of biodiversity and the respect of their lands (ibid.).

2. Context: Climate Change Governance

The international system of climate change governance is a creation of the States and for the States, leaving only a little room for other actors. This State-centric organization can be perceived as a reflection of the colonial system, but even if these activities have been condemned, the hierarchy remains and the Indigenous Peoples have not been empowered. Besides the fact that they have not been properly integrated into the institutional system, some authors argue that the whole system would benefit the integration of their perspectives and knowledge into the operating process (Brugnach 2017, Ford and al. 2016, Whyte 2016).

Role in the UNFCCC

With only a non-state observer seat for the Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) in the UNFCCC, Indigenous Peoples depend on their national States to be heard within the negotiation process. Since these communities are often marginalized by their own governments, important implications relating to their political representation within the international community occur and it is unlikely that their interests and propositions will be promoted (Brugnach 2017, Ford and al. 2016). However, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) is an inspirational example of acknowledgment and integration of the Indigenous People (Ford and al. 2016). Some interesting propositions have been made to improve their involvement in the UNFCCC, for example: the addition of two new seats for Indigenous Peoples as Parties of the Convention and the creation of an indigenous advisory body which ensures the integration of Indigenous Peoples' interests into the negotiation-process (Ford and al. 2016).

For some communities, institutions are operated in contradiction to their system of organization. One of them is the Potawatomi Peoples in the United-States. This community does not have a fixed organizational system but rather follows the cycle of the seasons ("seasonal round") and adapts its "institutional" system to the tasks that have to be achieved according to the availability of resources or the crop calendar. This kind of procedure contradicts most organizations structures which follow set administrative guidelines or secretarial norms in order to fulfill its functions. For the Potawatomi Peoples, this way of functioning gives them the flexibility they need, thus, they can adapt to environmental changes and therefore better respond to the "dynamic of the ecosystem" (Whyte 2016). The integration of the Indigenous Peoples' perspectives into the governance of climate change

could bring creative and inclusive solutions, such as the consideration of more flexible resource allocation .

Knowledge Recognition

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) demonstrated in its Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) in 2013 openness for Indigenous or “traditional” knowledge and practices as a parallel source to scientific community development (Ford and al. 2016). However, this source is rather seen as another category of knowledge, an “unscientific” source that goes against innovation and progress. Some indigenous knowledge is also in contradiction with the IPCC’s main scientific tendencies (Brugnach 2017).

Funding

Because of their specific vulnerable position and their needs for adaptation, the IPOs asked for the creation of a special fund for the Indigenous Peoples, which would be distributed regardless of their State situation or their geographical localisation (Ford and al. 2016). The actual adaptation funds are unidirectional from the Annexe 1 countries (developed countries) to the others (developing and less developed countries), however, communities in need are also situated in donators countries. Furthermore, this financial aid is managed by the States and often national governments do not pass it on to marginalized communities.

Reinterpretation of the International Law

Within the arena of international law, tools to protect Indigenous Peoples’ rights exist, however the actual interpretation from the States does not give the necessary power to the communities to protect their lands and resources.

Firstly, the “Doctrine of Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources” had been created with a decolonization perspective with the aim of preventing from the interference of a powerful States over the natural resources of the new independents countries (Miranda 2012). Today, this doctrine is used against Indigenous Peoples, giving the sole authority to States which, as a result, enables them to exploit Indigenous People’s resources and territories without their consent. These communities are now in the same position than the ones who tried to be protected by this doctrine.

“Like colonial peoples and developing states, indigenous peoples have been subject to an inequitable distribution of developmental gains. In this vein, application of the doctrine of permanent sovereignty over natural resources to indigenous peoples serves as a necessary platform for indigenous peoples’ control over the means and goals of their own progress” (Miranda, 2012).

Secondly, the following right: “Indigenous Peoples’ Right to Prior Consultation or Consent” “serves a gatekeeping function in the context of state development projects by requiring governments to engage in a meaningful dialogue and consensus-building process with indigenous communities that would bear the impacts of the project” (Miranda 2012). However, it’s not a veto right for the Indigenous People and most States prefer the broad and loose interpretation of this right, giving little power to the affected communities.

With more political will and an appropriate guidance on the interpretation of these juridic tools, Indigenous Peoples would be better empowered to defend their rights and protect their lands.

3. Reflection

There has been great improvement in the inclusion of indigenous communities within the framework of the UNFCCC , e.g. a workshop attended by Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) took place in 2014: “Best practices and available tools for the use of indigenous and traditional knowledge and practices for adaptation, and the application of gender sensitive approaches and tools for understanding and assessing impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change”. The recommendations from the workshop have had an influence on the UNFCCC decision-making-process and some actions were taken regarding indigenous communities and traditional knowledge (Ford and al. 2016). The Paris Agreement is also an historic step forward in comparison to the Kyoto Protocol, acknowledging Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge and rights in the preamble (Ford and al. 2016). However, United Nations institutions tend to recognise the Indigenous Peoples vulnerability as a “bad luck”-position and do not explicitly admit the links between climate injustice and colonisation practices which impact their environment (Whyte 2016). For the Indigenous Peoples, fighting for climate justice means tackling colonial structures, which are still present in today’s environmental and climate change institutions. It calls into question their self-determination; the respect for their lands and their rights; and the rejection of industrial and capitalist values, which are imposed onto them. Tackling climate change without considering colonial issues is problematic, since many policies regarding mitigation were a threat to the Indigenous Peoples (Whyte 2016)³. Unfortunately, it is likely that the decisions taken within a non-inclusive process will have a future negative impact on communities if the colonial hierarchy remains in the global governance system

³ for example, the REDD+ programs that aim to protect forests from deforestation, but end in the displacement of indigenous communities, preventing them from accessing their sacred land or pursuing their traditions (Whyte, 2016).

Conclusion

Climate justice is increasingly becoming more important within the context of global warming. Climate change can no longer merely be discussed as natural disasters; the growing gap between rich and poor - developed and developing countries - strong and more vulnerable communities - is being strengthened by its interdisciplinarity character. In order to achieve the goal of keeping global temperatures below 1.5 degrees, we not only need to protect the atmosphere but protect human rights. The impacts of climate change have a direct effect on basic human rights in that they affect the rights for social security, e.g. the right to habitat, nourishment and health. Global inequalities have historic origin and within the realms of environmental colonialism, are still being reflected within today's global climate change governance.

With "Catch23", we want to induce change, trigger a thought-provoking process of making heard the voices of the Global South and the Indigenous Peoples within the framework of international climate change politics. By passing on our collected material to a YOUNGO member, we aim to precipitate action; we believe that participants' reflections and discussions triggered among young climate activist by the project, can have an impact on today's fight for climate justice.

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Auto-Evaluation

Our project “Catch23: A Postcolonial Reflection on Climate Justice”, which we prepared for the seminar is much more than a sole university-oriented project. We are both very concerned about climate change and try to engage as much as possible in activities which help protect the environment, if in our freetime or by focusing our studies on the environment. Our main interest lies in the inclusive process of climate change adaptation and mitigation. This seminar has given us great opportunity to gain an understanding of postcolonial perspectives and therefore, to be able to critically assess the international governance within the framework of environmental colonialism. Both having had, through previous courses, initial engagement with the topic of “global inequalities”, the seminar gave us greater insight into postcolonial theories including a historical background on colonialism and de-colonialism.

Finding the right way to combining our commitment towards the environment and the necessity for the fight for climate justice with the decolonizing theories, which we have learnt in class, was a demanding process. Nevertheless, we feel very happy about how this project has evolved and are confident that the project will trigger communication but are mostly happy about being able to put it into practice. Practice means action. For us, having submitted this project as a programme contribution to COY and actually having been selected for participation, means a small step within a big step needed to be taken. We very much look forward to meeting in Bonn (travelling from Berlin and Canada) and being able to taking this project into the next phase. It is a great opportunity, being able to share with young activist from all over the world the inspiration that this seminar has given us.

Because of how this project - which is now surpassing the university environment - has developed; because of our excitement of writing an essay on this topic; because we think the project will contribute to the reflection on environmental colonialism in the generations to come; because we have managed to demonstrate academic research in a creative way; because we are deeply and personally, from our heart and mind, but also in time and money, involved in the project; because we believe we are doing something very important and truly hope we will reach our goals; we are proud of the project “Catch23”, and therefore grade it with a 1,0.

We look forward to receiving your constructive feedback on our project and welcome any suggestions on how to improve it with possible add-ons or amendments. Thank you for the freedom you have given us in this seminar. It has triggered an important opportunity for us.

Marie Boutin, Ricarda Faber