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Neoliberal capitalism uses every resource to benefit the wealthy and its companies including people, culture, the environment, and politics. The environment has always been a global issue because what happens in one part of the world inevitably effects other parts of the world because we cannot control the wind, ocean currents, or weather from spreading pollution globally. This is why environmental issues are present in every facet of life including economic, political, and cultural. How the environment interacts with these parts of life is uneven around the world because neoliberalism generally benefits the Global North and exploits the Global South to maximize profits. The ecological relations between countries and globally is in a serious state of crisis and needs to be addressed to end the massive pollution we are witnessing in the name of capitalism. Economically, the waste along the supply chain and privatization have disadvantaged the poorest people. Politically, the Paris Agreement, genetically modified organisms, and the rise of Somali pirates all represent the short-comings with current action to combat climate change. Culturally, consumerism and neoliberal ideology promoted through Northern hegemony have institutionalized the climate challenges we face today and makes addressing climate change even harder. In response to these multidimensional challenges, the Global Justice Movement offers a multifaceted way to address these issues on the economic, political, and cultural levels.

While almost every scientist agrees that climate change is happening, many people disagree on the seriousness of the consequences of climate change and what should be done. Lomborg believes that global warming actually results in a net benefit for the world until 2070, so for now no drastic actions should be taken to combat climate change (Lomborg 2013: 2). There is a correlation between economic growth and CO2 emissions, so there are economic reasons for why there should not be environmental laws (Lomborg 2013: 5). Lomborg believes the best way to deal with climate change in the long run is to invest in research and development of green energy to make it cheaper (Lomborg 2013: 13). Klein on the other hand believes climate change is happening now and is very serious (Klein 2011: 5). The world needs to stop polluting and destroying its natural resources through planning the economy and agriculture to maintain biodiversity and prevent any economic consequences. Also, Klein believes corporations need to be monitored and forced to stop polluting the world (Klein 2011: 7). Robinson agrees with Klein and goes further in his assessment of human induced climate change by stating we will face mass extinction if we do not stop our exploitation of the planet (Robinson 2014: 15). Klein’s arguments are more compelling than Lomborg’s because it is obvious that climate change poses a real threat to everyone’s lives on the planet and the well-being of the planet should not be sacrificed to make the 1% even wealthier.

Ecological relations, like most of the other dimensions in the world, are unevenly spread across the world. The Global North sees the environment as a resource to extract everything from to use for capitalism. Through human-induced climate change the environment has witnessed the greenhouse effect leading to melting ice caps which in turn rises sea levels and rising sea levels will eventually cover coastal areas (Steger 2013: 93). There has been a loss of biodiversity with projections that over half of all animal and plant species will be extinct by the end of the century, and overfishing, the build-up of toxic waste, and the pollution and depletion of water are happening on a daily basis (Steger 2013: 94-95). Water is an especially contentious subject because to increase the safety and availability of water some promote privatization of water while others promote public control. Those who promote privatization claim that there is more access to water and cheaper prices to help those who need water the most (Segerfeldt 2006: 4), but those who promote public control point to the fact that privatization often leads to price hikes that are disproportionately harmful to the poor (Food and Water Watch 2011: 1). The United Nations has stated there is now more water availability, but they count water pipes installed to determine water accessibility and just because there are pipes does not mean water is actually available (Barlow 2012: 7). Also, water is used much more by the Global North, and the United States consumes the most water by far in the world. Our goods such as a two liter bottle of soda requires 80-130 gallons of water to make and our jeans takes 550 gallons of water to create2. This is another example of how ecological relations today are focused on using natural resources as a limitless commodity when in actuality water and the environment has a limit. Climate change is a serious threat to every aspect in our lives, but our society, especially in the United States, continues to use resources and exploit the planet for our own immediate benefit.

As the North continues to exploit the environment, the countries in the Global South are the ones who bear the brunt because they rely on the land to live and are in more vulnerable low lying areas (Shiva 2000: 112). Also, the North sends factories that produce CO2 and other emissions because labor is cheaper in the South, so death or illness resulting from pollution has less of an economic effect. Most people in the Global South, wealthy capitalists reason, are too worried about surviving day to day than with environmental issues, so it makes sense to send their pollution to countries less likely to protest (Shiva 2000: 114). This is not wholly true as seen in the People’s Agreement created at the World People’s Conference on Climate Change which was created in the Global South by countries living in the South dealing with the Global North’s pollution. This called for the Global North to take responsibility for its increasing emissions including paying the poor countries that suffer the most from their pollution, create an international environmental pact which would actually stop the warming of the planet, and recognize that everyone has a right to water among many other statements (WPCCC 2010: 4-6). So while ecological relations are unevenly spread across the world, many people are working to end this.

Economically, many companies through increased globalization of the commodity chain have contributed to climate change. For example, food travels from all over the world to different countries and some studies show that nonlocal food produces six to twelve times the amount of carbon emissions than local food produces (Shiva 2000: 115). Also, in order to make the commodity chain as cheap as possible to maximize profits, many companies in the Global North have exported their factories to the Global South where the environmental regulations are looser. Therefore, companies do not have to pay taxes or invest in cleaner ways to create their products so they make more money. Also, more pollution is sent out into the environment (Shiva 2000: 114). Not only do these factories make pollutants in the Global South, but factories in the Global North who produce toxic waste send their chemicals to the Global South to ostensibly be recycled. It is expensive in the Global North to dispose of toxic waste because there are laws banning dumping of these chemicals into the environment and to ship toxic chemicals to India from Germany is $2,500 cheaper than disposing of it in Europe (Shiva 2000: 116).

Also, through the increased privatization of farms the environmental crises have worsened but have benefitted large corporations. The system of large industrial farms which utilize genetic engineering to mass produce food has driven food prices up for the poor and contributes to the global hunger problem. Also, farmers are stuck purchasing expensive seeds and chemicals from these industrial farms because their landlords or money lenders sell them these items. Some people argue that industrial farming is the only way to end global hunger, but it has been shown small, independent farms are more productive and use natural ways to grow food (Bello and Baviera 2010: 70-71). Fertilizers used by industrial farms contain harmful chemicals that enter our food, bodies, and environment, but peasants use farming techniques that have existed before these chemicals were even invented4. Both the privatization and the race to produce products and cut corners by companies to maximize their profits have contributed to the ecological crisis we face today.

In the political realm, the recent Paris Climate Deal appears to be a positive tool to address climate change. It’s main goals are to curb carbon emissions in an effort to keep the total global warming to at or below 1.5degrees Celsius, reanalyze their goals and the environment every five years, and have those countries producing the most pollutants pay other countries for the damages they have incurred (Vaughan 2015: 1-2). The problem with the Paris Agreement is that there is no mechanism to make countries comply with these goals and no consequences if countries continue to emit pollutants or do not compensate vulnerable countries for climate change1. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also have the same problems the Paris Agreement has. They replace the Millennial Development Goals (MDGs) and include the commitment to sustainable, inclusive economic growth worldwide. These goals are also not obligatory like the Paris Agreement, and it is questionable if they will actually help create a sustainable global system because it is reformist instead of transformist. Therefore, it does not adequately address the concerns of the Global South which were outlined in the People’s Agreement which advocates for a transformist way of dealing with the environment in the international political realm2.

One aspect of environmental challenges that is both political and economic is genetically modified organisms. Recent genetically modified seeds are created so farmers cannot save the seeds and replant them the next year creating a dependency on seed companies and exacerbating food crises. Besides disadvantaging farmers in the Global South, there is the possibility that this genome could transfer itself into other plants species found naturally near farms could lead to the end of all plant species and therefore all life on the planet. These seeds are protected by governments and patents making the issue political because there should be more research done about these seeds to look at the possible environmental effects (Shiva 2000: 120). If these seeds could actually translate their gene that stops natural reproduction, the government needs to stop them from being circulated.

Somali Pirates are another group reacting to environmental challenges resulting from politics and economics. Somali Pirates threaten the supply chain and logistics of Transnational Corporations headquartered in the Global North. These pirates are successful only .123% of the time, but the world spends approximately $2 billion a year to protect businesses near Somalia. Somalis have turned to piracy to address the loss of their livelihood through illegal overfishing and the dumping of toxic waste by Western companies in Somali waters. At first these pirates were a new kind of policing force to ensure that environmental practices would not prevent Somalis from being able to live, but now with so little fishes left piracy is their primary job3. This is an example of how the Global North is exploiting the environment and creating its own problems in the process. If companies had been ecologically responsible in and around Somalia, they would not have to contend with pirates.

Culturally, our society, especially in the Global North, is centered on consumerism. The United States consumes 30-40% of the world’s natural resources even though we only constitute 6% of the world’s population in order to fuel our culture of overconsumption (Steger 2013: 89). The richest 20% in the world also consume 76.6% of all goods created in the world, which highlights the unevenness of fault for climate crises today2. Capitalists have used cultural influences through advertising and other avenues to legitimize neoliberalism and shape our daily lives to include massive consumption (Kincheloe 2002: 130-131). This consumerist culture is not conducted in sustainable or safe way either. As Leonard describes in her video *The Story of Stuff*, the current supply chain pollutes and wastes resources at almost every part of production from destroying forests to extract resources to make products to polluting water with toxic byproducts (Leonard 4). Furthermore, while Majumder discusses how fast fashion disadvantages workers, it also contributes to the waste the Global North creates because many of these products are designed to tear after a short amount of time (Majumder 2013: 70). Consumerism benefits capitalism because most economists believe capitalism must continually grow and seek new markets to maximize their profits, so people such as Lomborg worry that environmental protection laws such as the carbon tax to help cut emissions will stem economic growth (Lomborg 2013: 12).

The cultural hegemony the Transnational Capitalist Class has extends to other facets of life that effect environmental issues such as folk knowledge. Indigenous knowledge of the land and how best to raise crops and treat the land is increasingly being silenced in favor of Western knowledge (Shiva 2000: 116-117). Through patents and privatization this knowledge which is ingrained in indigenous culture is controlled and discouraged (Shiva 2000: 117). Organizations such as Navdanya are combatting the usurpation of knowledge by neoliberalism. Navdanya is a seed bank that encourages biodiversity by protecting seeds and allowing them to acclimate to new climates and brings people together to share knowledge in an effort to preserve folk knowledge of farming4.

The best ways to address these issues because they are multidimensional is through an organization such as the Global Justice Movement which deals with neoliberalism from economic, political, cultural, and environmental ways. The Global Justice Movement promotes literacy on neoliberalism and the possible transforming ways we can make the world better. A new world in which politics and economics are more evenly controlled and the environment is a priority is possible and can be achieved5. Some concrete ways this can be achieved is through participatory instead of representative democracy because governments are often more concerned with keeping capitalists interests at heart instead of the people. With more participatory democracy people can demand environmental legislation is passed. Also, to combat consumerism and its negative effects, cooperatives are a positive way for people to buy food and clothing they know has been usually locally and organically sourced. This cuts down on emissions and waste created in the supply chain and leads to the decommodifcation of the land by using it for collective benefit instead of for profit (Kelly 2013: 6). Some people champion microfinance to not only help end poverty and hunger but also brings goods to people made locally which cuts down on pollution as well. Microfinance disadvantages the poor by pitting them against each other to make money and Bateman argues that cooperatives are the only real way to promote sustainable development (Bateman 2015: 11). Recently there have been many protests and revolts around the world reflecting the goals of the Global Justice Movement. Many people feel the neoliberal economic model has collapsed, and they are trying to use cooperative action through social media and protests to demand change (Mason 2013: 1). Unfortunately, those who are most hurt by environmental crises, the poor and minorities, are often the ones who are not included in these recent protests (Smith et al 2014: 164). In order for the Global Justice Movement to be most effective it needs to include the people who are hurt the most by climate change as well as those who are contributing the most to open their eyes to their pollution and wastefulness.

We are facing an ecological crisis, but the popular opinion today among states in the Global North is to ignore the problem even though they are contributing to the emissions the most. The earth is well on its way to approaching an increased temperature of 2 degrees Celsius if countries do not stop polluting the earth and destroying the natural resources. Most scientists agree if we reach the 2 degree Celsius mark it will be catastrophic for the planet and could lead to some of the effects we fear the most such as low-lying areas flooding1. These coastal areas include famous cities such as New York City and London, so the Global North should be much more worried about climate change than they currently are (Steger 2013: 94). Instead of catering to transnational corporations, governments should be protecting their people like they were created to do which includes addressing climate change. This also requires a cultural change because excessive consumerism and wastefulness is ingrained in our culture and these actions are contributing to the negative effects we are witnessing today. The Global Justice Movement provides a good framework for society to begin addressing climate change issues because it emphasizes protecting the environment through direct political participation, cooperative action, and creating a new world in which we can all live sustainably and with dignity.

Endnotes

1Lecture, 3.31.16

2Lecture, 4.7.16

3Lecture, 2.23.16

4Lecutre, 3.22.16

5Lecture, 1.21.16

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