

Climate injustice and the making of the subject through peripheral lenses

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Climate-induced global change entails a blatant asymmetry. The lightest green-house emitters, for instance, end up facing the worst climate-related consequences due to pre-existing conditions of rural poverty, steep terrain, dearth of public infrastructure, and weak governance. A case in point being Guatemala, which is considered in the top four countries more at risk vis-à-vis climate change with more than half of its inhabitants living below the poverty line. This means that rural Guatemalans who were already enduring hardship and marginalization have now to deal with more frequent extreme-weather events and are even asked to adjust to the new circumstances. More often than not decision makers and aid organizations seem to dodge the need for climatic justice in terms of coming to terms with the negative externalities brought about by economic growth and market fundamentalism. It seems unfair for citizens in the global South to be burdened with the warming of the planet spawned by increasing fossil-fuel combustion needed to supply global markets with an amount of goods conducive to overconsumption and opulence. Consumerism in the global North is, therefore, a major hindrance for reaching economic de-growth and those attempts to offset overconsumption by imposing more restrictions upon the already impoverished global South beg the question of justice and ethics in contemporary global politics. It all boils down to a clash of subjectivities, i.e., that of the utility-maximizing agent at the core of neo-classical economics and an emancipated subject whose work rationale and land ethics make him a counter-hegemonic wrinkle in the fabric of society. Agroecology-based smallholders in Western Guatemala, for instance, represent the latter given their commitment with: (i) the ecological integrity of their territories; (ii) a frugal-yet-fulfilling lifestyle; and (iii) an economic rationale based upon reciprocity and mutual care as opposed to profit. What are then the contemporary main drivers for the making of an economically unquenchable subject? What needs to be done in order to bridge the gap between the affluent North and the impoverished South? Are there any examples of climatically just practices with the potential to be scaled up?