

“The Global Governance Crises” Who Would Think About the Dollar (\$) When the Earth Begins to Tremble? Analysing Climate Change and Global Warming using Theoretical Perspectives in Global Political Economy

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Abstract: *The emergence of the industrial revolution in its wake has served humanity with several challenges including a shift from the stable Holocene to the unstable Anthropocene (1750 – 2010) (Steffan et al., 2015). Today, climate change has been a topical issue of concern around the world, forming a dominant vocabulary in our terminologies. Scientists and environmental scholars alike have tipped the increasing economic growth and production as a major threat and root cause of our changing climate with Dalby et al., (2013) citing that the influence of man on earth’s species is absolutely global in scale and scope. There has therefore been an advocacy for a process of decoupling economic growth and environmental protection. The regulation of emissions from industrial productions which contribute to the challenge of a warming globe has particularly been an issue to grapple with by governments, environmental activists, global governance institutions and other multinational non-governmental agencies around the world. With an increase in the acknowledgement of the close linkage between human activities and their impacts on the environmental as cited by Dalby et al., (2013), there has therefore been the need to properly understand the key issues of change within the global political economic setting. In a bit to understand, analyse and properly explain underpinnings of this global governance crises of climate change, three traditional perspectives in global political economy are relevant. These theories include realism, liberalism and Marxist approaches essential to understanding the forces of change in the global political economy. This paper therefore seeks to explore these three classical theories and their perspectives in explaining the global governance crisis of climate change and global warming. Extensive literature was reviewed to ascertain the findings for the study with results presented in simple narrative. The three major approaches and theories in analysing the global governance crises of climate change provide a wide and comprehensive understanding of the issue. In the view of the realist, the world is in anarchy and lacks a central system of government or authority and views cooperation through a pessimistic lens, citing that some countries tend to override other countries seeking to fulfil their interests and goals in bilateral and multilateral agreements. The Liberalist crusades against capitalism and requests for the empowerment of people and further calls for the involvement of international governing bodies to address the issue of a climate crises. The Marxist also campaigns against capitalism and believes in empowering the indigenous people. It further asserts that economic growth is a leading cause of environmental degradation and advocates for reduced economic growth.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the industrial revolution in its wake has served humanity with several challenges including a shift from the stable Holocene to the unstable Anthropocene (1750 – 2010) (Steffan et al., 2015). Today, climate change has been a topical issue of concern around the world, forming a dominant vocabulary in our terminologies. Scientists and environmental scholars alike have tipped the increasing economic growth and production as a major threat and root cause of our changing climate with Dalby et al., (2013) citing that the influence of man on earth’s species is absolutely global in scale and scope. There has therefore been an advocacy for a process of decoupling economic growth and environmental protection. The regulation of emissions from industrial productions which contribute to the challenge of a warming globe has particularly been an issue to grapple with by governments, environmental activists, global governance institutions and other multinational non-governmental agencies around the world. With an increase in the acknowledgement of the close linkage between human activities and their impacts on the environmental as cited by Dalby et al., (2013), there has therefore been the need to

properly understand the key issues of change within the global political economic setting. In a bit to understand, analyse and properly explain underpinnings of this global governance crises of climate change, three traditional perspectives in global political economy are relevant. These theories include realism, liberalism and Marxist approaches essential to understanding the forces of change in the global political economy. This paper therefore seeks to explore these three classical theories and their perspectives in explaining the global governance crisis of climate change and global warming.

2. THE GLOBAL CRISES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND A WARMING GLOBE

Deeply etched within The Little Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs as cited in Knowles (2016), is the native American saying that “*When the last tree has been cut down, the last fish caught, the last river poisoned, only then will we realize that one cannot eat money*”. This profound statement has been quite legendary in highlighting and underscoring the need to protect our environment. The world has witnessed several chronicles of events which have marked the complex nature of climate change to be tackled by governments and global governance institutions. A major challenge which has hampered concerted efforts to tackle this issue of climate change has been the narrative of pointing accusing fingers and pushing the blame of increase environmental degradation and the earth’s woes on poor countries in the global south. These poor countries have cited by some developed countries as being the causative agents to the problem of our changing climate, a well-worn notion referred to as “*the Environmentalism of the poor*”. This concept has marred efforts to properly identify and tackle the root causes of climate change to effectively abate its concomitant effects. Furthermore, a major challenge to properly addressing the crises of climate change has been the link between economic growth and environmental protection. Advocacies in the 1970s for environmental protection, and the rise of deliberations on the narrative of ‘Limits to Growth’ have been movements birth out of the crave to reduce the footprints of economic growth on the environment (Meadows et al. 1972). Scholars and researchers alike have also advocated for a reduction in perpetual pursuit of economic development without giving concerns to the environment, a concept known as “*Degrowth*”. The question arises whether or not the rich countries are willing stop developing economically. How about economic development in the global south? How would poorer countries develop if we are to embrace the concept of “*Degrowth*”? Additionally, the issue of climate change has proven difficult to tackle due to the complex nature of accounting for externalities. In instances where sanctions are placed on rich countries which emit high greenhouse gases, these countries tend to find the penalties which they pay as having the right to pollute. This has gone a long way to impede effort aimed at reducing emissions globally. There has also been the general challenge in allocating the cost and bearers of emissions produced by some countries. In China for instance, 44% of emissions generated go in line with producing goods for some other industrialized countries. Who then pays to compensate for this emission? These questions and issues surrounding climate change have rendered the problem quite complicated and have crippled efforts in effectively managing this issue of climate change properly. It has been thus deemed crucial and quite empirical to address the issue of climate change in its wake as the impact of a changing climate could have far reaching effects and global consequences. International gatherings such as the Stockholm Conference in 1972 and the Rio Conference in 1992 have in essence linked environmental concerns with development and the global economy, and the need to over geopolitical barriers in addressing these issues.

The past two decades have witnessed scholars of international political economy and the environment (IPEE) becoming more concentrated on the study of various international cooperative initiatives. This development had been necessitated with the objective of linking economic and environmental issues following the Brundtland Report in 1987 and the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (Clapp & Helleiner, 2011). These essential accomplishments according to the authors have improved the understanding of topics within the domains of global political economy and the environment, some of which include the economic scopes of international environmental governance, the environmental mandates of international economic organisations and regimes, and the new forms of private international regimes which govern the environment.

3. ANALYSING THE CLIMATE CRISIS (CLIMATE CHANGE) USING THE LENSES OF TRADITIONAL APPROACHES OF REALISM, LIBERALISM AND MARXISM.

3.1. Realist Approach

Can a collective action be achieved in world which lacks a global government as characterized by anarchy? Although holding reservations and some form of pessimism against international cooperation, the realists however believe that addressing the issue of global warming requires concerted efforts from both the global north and south, typically in reducing emissions from production activities whilst at the same time making commitments to foster the integrity of the planet Cohn (2014). In the view of Clapp & Dauvergne, (2011), the issues which define the relationship between the global political economy and the environment are often technical and scientific, but are frequently also socioeconomic and political.

Furthermore, according to the realist view, decisions made by a given country in general international meetings appear to be overriding the interests and concerns of other nations, a concept referred to by Cohn (2014) as ‘*hegemony*’ (identified with the power of a dominant state). The United States for instance has been cited as exhibiting some form of hegemony in matters and decisions relating to the United Nations, and sometimes going contrary to the UN’s Charter without having tough sanctions being meted out. This has mostly been attributed to the huge funds the United States supports the United Nations with. In analysing this global governance crises, the theory of realism brings on board the quest to analyse how a particular state or some countries seek to impose their self-interests at the expense of other countries’ interest in bilateral or multilateral bargaining situations. This challenge of unequal power relations among nations has therefore impeded efforts aimed at pooling resources together and rendered the process of addressing climate change complex and a herculean task to achieve. Realism also holds the assumption of anarchy and views the world as a self-help system, citing that the emphasis on state power and that the aim of statesmen is to preserve the health and power of their states.

A large body of literature have shown the linkages and interconnectedness between climate change and the springing up of wars as evidenced in the case of the Arab spring. As a critique, in analysing the global governance issue of a climate crises, realist Global Political Economy appears to be less concerned with war and security but more concerned with economic wealth of nations. This has therefore limited the extent and scope to which the global crises of climate change can be addressed.

3.2. Liberalist Approach

In analysing the challenges to addressing climate issues, the Liberals generally hold the opinion that individuals have the capacity to improve environmental conditions and this improvement could be achieved with the advancement in science and technology. Cohen, (2014) identifies three types of liberalists mainly approaches in analysing the environmental issues; Orthodox Liberalist, Interventional Liberalist and Institutional Liberalists present diverse analysis of the issue of climate change.

In the view of the Orthodox liberalists economic growth is the driving factor which pushes for better environmental policies. In instances when some industrial activities adversely affect the quality of air and water quality in a short term period, there is an equal contribution to economic growth and this they believe would improve conditions of the environmental with time. Additionally, the orthodox liberalists assert that with rising income level of individuals offers these individuals better abilities and incentives to improve conditions of the environment. Thus, the best policy for the environment according to the orthodox liberalist is to promote economic growth through open trade and foreign investment policies without government interference (Clappe and Dauvergne, 2006).

Interventionist liberals advocate for market-based solutions to addressing environmental problems, but they request the involvement of the government in addressing the market's shortfalls whilst ensuring that businesses adhere to policies which are environmentally friendly. Governments according to these liberalists should employ market-based policies other than mandatory policies where possible to protect the environment. These include the imposition of environmental taxes, tradable pollution permits, and offering market incentives to encourage firms to produce environmental products. Governments also need to encourage organisations to adopt voluntary measures to improve environmental conditions.

Institutional liberals, just like Interventionist liberalist also prefer market-based solutions, but they further demand for strong global institutions to help coordinate efforts aimed at dealing with the issues of environmental degradation, pollution as well as resource scarcity. For example, liberals such as Oran Young have underscored the effectiveness of international environmental regimes in dealing with oil pollution, the management of fisheries, and acid rain (Oran, 1999). These approaches, in my personal opinion are essential and would have a ripple effect nationwide and subsequently worldwide. There is however the need for cooperation if this feat is to be achieved.

Having mentioned the need for international cooperation, generally within the approach of Liberalism in Global Political Economy, it is underscored that for international cooperation to occur, there is the need to meet certain conditions, and requirements. International cooperation between nations are thus viewed as crucial since states are interdependent with no nation ever being an island in a real sense. The Liberalist in Global Political Economy assumes that in addressing the issue of Climate change, International institutions play an important role and thus should be established. It viewed as a significant milestone, the formation of the Bretton Woods financial institutions including the World Bank and IMF in 1994 to govern international finance in the post-war years (Ravenhill, 2020). As evinced, these international institutions including the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have taken lead roles as organizations to tackle the issues of environmental degradation and global warming (Cohen, 2014). This step, in the view of WDED (1987) takes the form of providing technological, financial, and the knowledge base to assist in promoting sustainable development, meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs as outlined by Brundtland (1987). But as a critique, it is argued that these institutions generally give more priority to economic issues than environmental concerns. A point worthy of mention is the fact that Liberalism in Global Political Economy opens up for diverging interests within the state and considers bargaining games at both the international and domestic levels. The aim of the state in such endeavours is not to only promote its own wealth and power, but protect the freedoms and property rights of its citizens, and their welfare, and ensure international order.

3.3 Marxists View

The Marxist approach which falls under Critical environmental theorists, often referred to as the greens, argue that economic growth fuels global environmental challenges, and further cites that environmental degradation affects some individuals and nations more than others due to globalization and inequality (Cohn, 2014). Some greens according to the author, are historical materialists and argue that capitalism is the leading source of environmental degradation. The approach of Marxism criticizes the Bretton Woods financial institutions which include the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) for focusing on economic subjects and calls for a radical restructuring of the global economy. As evidenced, the outcomes of various general meetings had under the auspices of these international bodies in relation to the environment have left much to be desired. In the Kyoto protocol for instance, aside there being only a few countries which had emission reduction targets, the commitments which were spelt out to help in climate mitigation were not promising enough with commitments being made by countries to reduce emissions by only 5%.

Generally, the aim of Marxist theories of Global Political Economy is to remove the economic differences within and between societies rejects economic globalization and embrace a return to autonomy for both local and indigenous communities (Clappe and Dauvergne, 2006). They advocate that the pursuit of capitalism will always produce tensions, instability and crisis aside the obvious environmental effects and requests for degrowth and the decoupling of economic activities from sustainability and environmental protection. Furthermore, to avoid the outcome of environmental degradation with our changing climate, the Marxists call for limits on economic growth and population growth otherwise known as ‘Degrowth’ (Clappe and Dauvergne, 2006). As a critique to the Marxist approach of analysing the issue, the concept of degrowth has however been contested with some academicians and scholars alike citing that it is impossible to reduce growth in some sectors of the economy such as medical care. It is further expounded debunking the notion of degrowth, the fact that poorer countries still require economic development. The lack of a full embrace by all nations for this

concept has been a major setback to collectively addressing the issue of climate change and has rendered the issue a complex one. Aside the Marxist theory, critics generally question whether the overall critical perspectives (historical materialism, constructivism, feminism, and environmentalism) could provide sustainable alternatives to the mainstream perspectives. This concern according to Cohn (2014) is as a result of the key divisions which appear in the ranks of critical theorists. To resolve contentions and arrive at a common consensus among nations.

4. CONCLUSION

The issue of climate change has casted a long shadow across the face of the earth and has been a worrying issue to grapple with. The complexities of the issue have evolved due to the difficulties at reaching a consensus to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change by all nations around the world. The three major approaches and theories in analysing the global governance crises of climate change provide a wide and comprehensive understanding of the issue. In the view of the realist, the world is in anarchy and lacks a central system of government or authority and views cooperation through a pessimistic lens, citing that some countries tend to override other countries seeking to fulfil their interests and goals in bilateral and multilateral agreements. The Liberalist crusades against capitalism and requests for the empowerment of people and further calls for the involvement of international governing bodies to address the issue of a climate crises. The Marxist also campaigns against capitalism and believes in empowering the indigenous people. It further asserts that economic growth is a leading cause of environmental degradation and advocates for reduced economic growth.

Based on the given analysis above, I advocate for the Liberalist approach to understanding the issue of climate change. This is due to the fact that Liberalist approach provides a more comprehensive analysis of the issue with overarching perspectives which gives more insight into the problem or dilemma. It also borders on the capacity of individuals to bring about change and further calls for concert efforts at tackling the issue through global institutions with effective mechanisms for governance of climate related issues.

Permit me to chip in this line again as cited above ... *“When all the trees are cut, all animals are dead and all the water bodies are polluted, only then will we realize that we cannot eat money!”*

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Citation: Daniel Teye Aboah, “The Global Governance Crises” Who Would Think About the Dollar (\$) When the Earth Begins to Tremble? Analysing Climate Change and Global Warming using Theoretical Perspectives in Global Political Economy”, *International Journal of Research in Environmental Science (IJRES)*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 12-17, 2023. Available: DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2454-9444.0901002>

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