Global Modernity and Social Contestation

The Global Age: A Social Movement Perspective

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Introduction

The coordinators of this volume propose to explore the links between social movements and 'a general view of contemporary social processes' or a 'social configuration', to take Elias' concept. Following Touraine (1981), they consider that specific generations of social movements correspond to specific types of society. After the workers' movement in the industrial society and 'new social movements' more oriented towards cultural struggles and recognition in the 'post-industrial society', they raise the question: 'Is there a new generation of social movements that correspond to a new phase of modernity (late modernity)?'

I would like to develop this question in two directions. First, while most chapters of this volume consider a new stage of modernity, I suggest that we have entered an era that is neither modern nor post-modern and that Albrow (1996) calls 'the global age'. The limits of the planet and of natural resources impede pursuing the modern project based on permanent growth and represent a major challenge for humanity. Secondly, I will draw on an agency-centred approach, combining two major questions: 'Who are the social actors who challenge the normative orientation at the core of modernization and promote alternative values and practices that may contribute to the rise of a global age, or may embody glimpses of a global age society?' and 'Can we grasp some dimensions of life and society in the global age *by studying current social movements?*'

After sketching out the 'global age hypothesis' and the need for an agency-centred approach, I will briefly explore how the global age perspective sheds a new light on the meanings and potential of four movements (indigenous and small farmers' movements, local and convivial initiatives in Western cities and climate justice [CJ] NGOs) and, conversely, how these actors provide insights for a better understanding of the global age and social agency in and towards it.

Social Agency in the Global Age

The Global Age Hypothesis

The successive reports by the International Panel on Climate Change lead to a clear statement: The modern way of life is not sustainable. It alters fundamental geological and chemical cycles, generates global warming at an increasing pace and depletes natural resources. This assertion deeply questions modernity itself, as the modern worldview is built on the perspective of an ever-expanding world and infinite natural resources – that allows economists and corporations to consider nature as a 'free good' (JB Say) and to exclude 'externalities' from economic considerations – and on the idea of permanent growth, that is supposed to lead humanity towards progress and better living standards (IPCC, 2013).

In the first part of the 21st century, we may experience a shift from *Globalization* – defined as the expansion of modernization and driven by the idea of growth– to what Martin Albrow (1996) has called *the Global Age*. It may be synthetized as *a social configuration* (Elias, 1969) in which life and society are deeply shaped by an increasing reality and consciousness of (a) the interdependence at the scale of humanity and (b) the finitude of the planet.

Rather than a comeback to post-modern positions, whose hyper-cultural perspectives have been criticized (Best & Kellner, 1997), Albrow argues for the specificities of a new age that is neither modern, nor post-modern, but 'global'. The modern project is incompatible with the limits of the planet and its natural resources.

The global age is both *an objective and a subjective reality*. The objective reality of the global age is notably illustrated by the 'anthropocene perspective' (Crutzen, 2002) and by global warming. Its subjective reality is both the rising consciousness of the finitude of the planet and the resulting worldview (*Weltanschauung*). The rise of global dangers and challenges (nuclear, climate change) has increased the consciousness of a shared destiny at the scale of humanity and expanded a sense of cosmopolitan identity (Albrow, 1996; Beck, 2007). However, these objective and subjective realities of the global age do not always correspond. Elias (1991: 214) pointed out a significant delay: 'Compared to the relatively rapid change of the integration shift, the pace of the corresponding change in the social habitus of the individuals concerned is extraordinarily slow'. For instance, the oil peak in 2006 represents a considerable threat to modern economy and way of life (Urry, 2012). However, most policy makers, citizens and social scientists live and work as if the oil peak did not exist. Thus, modernity and the global age co-exist in the subjective and objective reality of our time.

Taking into account the finitude of the planet contradicts the modern project of perpetual expansion and improvement of living standards through new technologies and science. It sheds a new light on contemporary debates on development (Escobar, 1995), world system (Smith and Wiest, 2012), growth (Latouche, 2011; Jackson, 2008) and raises major challenges for society and its actors, from global institutions to the sense of responsibility of ordinary people. It deeply transforms the way individuals and communities consider and experience life, society and the world.

Social Change in (and towards) the Global Age

As social scientists, we can neither deny the reality of the impact of human activities on climate and the environment, nor endorse the idea of a determinist social transition resulting from an environmental crisis. Future scenarios in a world affected by climate change and the finitude of the planet are numerous (Urry, 2013). A 'business as usual in the midst of climate deregulation' scenario is far from excluded. It actually dominates current policies and habits and is supported by powerful actors, which makes it the most probable option as long as the main resources (and oil in particular) remain of relatively easy access.

The 'redemption catastrophe' scenario has recently gained impetus among intellectuals and activists. The founder of the transition movement (Hopkins, 2011) and some of the most protagonist ecological actors and thinkers (e.g., Cochet et al., 2012) maintain that a catastrophe is needed to push humanity to adopt the required changes. Such a direct link between major crises and social change is questionable. The multiplication of hurricanes in the US and the heavy pollution smog in Beijing (see Zhang & Barr, 2013) have not impeded the governments of the two most polluting countries to maintain their energy and industrial policies[1] largely unchanged. The Fukushima major nuclear disaster has not prevented the Japanese government from restarting its nuclear power plants.

My point is not to deny that a crisis may represent an opportunity for social agency. Nevertheless, no matter how large it is, the crisis itself does not generate social change. The latter depends on the capacity of social actors to highlight the questions spawned by the situation and to successfully promote alternative political visions and economic rationality. Moreover, actors who manage to impose their interpretation of the crisis and foster an alternative political and economic rationality are not always the progressive ones (Klein, 2008).

Developing perspectives for a better understanding of social agency in and towards the global age thus constitutes a major challenge for social scientists. It requires analyzing both progressive and conservative actors,

as well as the actors and mechanisms that foster the apathy in most individual and collective actors.

Social Movements as a Heuristic Tool

Studying social movements and the meanings and conflicts they raise provides us with two main ways to grasp elements of an upcoming social configuration with empirical data: social agency, on one side subjectivity and prefigurative action on the other side.

First, social movements contribute to the transformation of society[2]. Following Alain Touraine (1978), the concept of 'social movement' refers to a particular meaning of action; when actors challenge major normative orientations of a society and contribute to the transformation of this society. A good illustration was provided by Castells (1997), who started the second volume of his trilogy on the age of information by analyzing two movements that allowed him to understand some of the major transformations and influential actors of the next decade: the Zapatistas in Mexico and the Patriots in the US. The Zapatistas prefigured both the rising impact of indigenous movements in Latin America and the alter-globalization movement. The American Patriots and the grassroots conservative movements became the social constituency of Georges W. Bush government and of the Tea Party.

In addition to struggling for a different society, some social movements seek to embody it in their action and subjectivity. Prefigurative activism and the quest for more consistency between one's values and one's practices have become a central dimension of activism in many movements (Epstein, 1991; McDonald, 2006; Pleyers, 2010). It is notably the case among various sectors of ecological activists. The study of some environmental activists may thus provide us with empirical data about the impact of acute awareness of global interdependency and of the constraints of a limited planet on individual subjectivity and her sense of responsibility.

An agency-centred approach of the link between social movements and a general social configuration thus leads to the following question: 'Which actors challenge the normative orientation at the core of modernization, show the glimpses of a global age society and promote alternative values and practices that may contribute to the rise of a global age?'

Progressive Movements Towards the Global Age

While scientists and the International Panel on Climate Change have accumulated data alerting on the magnitude of climate change and its devastating consequences, more cars have been built old in 2014 than ever before[3]

and economic growth remains the main preoccupation of all governments. The challenges of the global age are huge and urgent, but changes in individual and collective behaviours have remained very limited so far. This paradox of social agency in the global age may however only be apparent. The panorama is different when we look at grassroots actors. While actions and worldviews of policy makers remain largely shaped by the modern context, challenges and constraints, elements of a different social configuration are experienced, lived and produced in the shadow of everyday life, local initiatives and citizen debates.

Indigenous People Movements

In the last two decades, Latin American indigenous movements[4] have contributed to changing governments and shaping major public debates, laws and new constitutions (Cortez, 2011; Le Bot, 2009). They have implemented alternative social and political organizations in their communities in the Americas, India (Srikant, 2009) among other regions of the world. They have become leading protagonists of major global movements, inspiring thousands of activists over the world, as it is notably the case of Zapatista rebellion and community organization (Holloway, 2002).

Indigenous movements impact is even wider among current ecological movements as it was on the global justice movement. Indigenous movements have revisited traditional cosmovisions to propose alternative perspectives of development, happiness and relations with 'nature' that are far more compatible with the constraints of a limited planet than current policies and worldvision. Among the most widespread concepts, the 'Buen Vivir' ('good life', 'Sumak Kausai' in Quetchua) draws on Bolivian and Ecuadorian indigenous cosmovisions. This epistemological, cultural and economic paradigm proposes an alternative conception of development and happiness that focuses not on growth, accumulation and mass consumption but on a 'good life', defined as a cultural expression of shared satisfaction of human needs in harmony with nature and the community (Kowii, 2012; Cortez, 2011). Its core principles are the following ones (Gudynas, 2011): a quest *for harmony, and not for growth and endless development;* the respect of 'Mother Earth' and of nature, to which humans are part of; the primacy of the community over individualism; a focus on complementarity, rather than competition; a de-commodification process in opposition to the '*monetarization of everything*'. It challenges core principles of modernity, such as the quest for a permanent growth and accumulation, the separation of nature and culture, and the primacy of expert knowledge.

However, indigenous people who implement this perspective as a personal and collective philosophy and in their community's daily life are

seldom visible in national and international public arenas. Their perspectives have been connected to an international audience through events, brokers (Tarrow, 2005) and 'translaters' (Sousa Santos et al., 2014). The 2009 World Social Forum in Belem and the 2010 People Forum on climate change in Cochabamba have contributed to diffusing their world-views and their plea for more respectful relations with nature. Combining insights from the post-colonial studies and inspirations from indigenous traditional knowledge that was often little formalized, progressive intellectuals (Gudynas, 2011; Houtart, 2010; Acosta & Martinez, 2012) have brought perspectives inspired by the 'buen vivir' into intellectual and political arenas, often based on an idealized perspective of indigenous communities and missing some of their complexity and their philosophical and cultural dimensions (Kowii, 2012). In the current global debates about an 'ecological transition', these perspectives oppose the 'scientific ecology' and the market and engineer solutions to deal with climate change, considered as rooted in a narrow Western perspective and do not deal with the roots of the problem.

Small Farmers

Small farmers were also supposed to disappear with modernization and its urbanization and industrialization processes. The capitalist and sovietist systems as well as Indian – so called – 'green revolution' and most non-aligned countries development projects sacrificed family agriculture on the altar of modern industrialization. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, agro-industry and food corporations have figured among the main winners of corporate globalization. In this context, it was unexpected that small farmers' movements would become major protagonists of global movements.

Founded in 1993, La Vía Campesina has become the most globalized movement network, claiming 200 million members in 88 countries. It has been a leading actor of the struggle against the World Trade Organization, the alter-globalization movement and World Social Forums. Its role is even more central among environmentalist movements towards a global age. La Vía Campesina's organization, discourses and aims actually embody the two main features of the global age (the integration and interdependency at the scale of humanity and the challenges of a limited planet). It has successfully framed itself – and small farmers in general – as a global actor and an indispensable stakeholder in dealing with climate change and environmental challenges. Therefore, they relied on a double strategy.

First, La Vía Campesina has been particularly successful in combining various scales of actions (Bringel, 2014), from the local to the global, while maintaining 'a balance between local realities and global action'

(Desmarais, 2007: 135). Agrarian movements put forward an alternative development model that relies *on relocalization, re-peasantization and de-commodification.* Their claims for local agroecology and food sovereignty directly challenge the corporate globalization and the global food system. At the same time, it has projected itself as a global actor, adopting as one of its main slogans 'Globalize struggle, Globalize hope' building international alliances to claim the right to food sovereignty (Claeys, 2012; Bringel, 2011). It has kept its focus not only on its grassroots constituency and on 'relocalization' as a main target, jealously guarding the autonomy in the inclusions of its grassroots voices, but it has also invested the World Social Forum and a number of UN arenas (Claeys, 2012; Gaarde, forthcoming). La Vía Campesina has contributed to building the global scale by its struggles and by integrating UN arenas. It has also reshaped the local scale, as a scale that is not opposed to the global nor pre-modern, but that may contribute to dealing with some challenges of the global age by the rescaling of life, production and consumption.

Secondly, rather than presenting their claims as a corporatist defence of small farmers, la Vía Campesina has successfully framed them as public interest of humanity and major contributions to dealing with key challenges of the global age: to feed the planet, to protect the environment and to limit global warming.

> We must go beyond the anthropocentric model, we must rebuild the cosmovision of our peoples, based on a holistic view of the relationship between the cosmos, mother earth, the air, water and all human beings. Human beings do not own nature but rather form part of all that lives. The small farmers, peasants and indigenous agriculturalists hold in their hands thousands of solutions to climate change (Vía Campesina's final declaration at the 2010 Summit on Climate in Cancun).

Indigenous communities and small farmers were previously considered as anachronistic leftovers of a pre-modern era that would disappear with the modernization process. They now inspire citizens and intellectuals worldwide and are widely considered as frontrunners of the global age. As summarized by an activist during the 2008 Social Forum in Mexico City, I was always taught to look at the North and the West. But today, if we want to change things, we have to look towards the South and towards the indigenous people'.

Indigenous cosmovisions and community and small farmers' alternatives are not much different from what these actors proposed a few decades ago, but the rise of the global age has provided a new space for small farmers and indigenous peoples' identity and agency and to the recognition of

their contribution to humanity. While their claims and projects did not fit in the modern project, they now *resonate* with the aspirations of thousands worldwide and with the objectives of international institutions.

Critical Consumption and Convivial Movements

The aspiration to build a world based on more self-reliant local communities is shared beyond indigenous communities and small farmers. It has recently gained a new impetus all over the Western world. 'Relocalization movements' were particularly active in Australia, the US and the UK in the mid-2000s. Hopkins (2011) has given a new impetus to local and ecological 'transition initiatives' in the UK and abroad. 'Voluntary simplicity' (de Bouver, 2009) has gained momentum and thousands of local food networks and 'community supported agriculture' have been created in the last decade. They question the industrial food system rationale that is responsible for one-third of human induced greenhouse gas emissions (Gilbert, 2012) and promote family farms. Critical consumption is understood as the deliberate and conscious attention paid to consumption choices in order to reify political positions connected with moral conceptions and global responsibility (Pleyers, 2011). Its rapid expansion (notably in the food sector) testifies the consciousness of some constraints of the global age has reached far beyond classic environmental activists. Moreover in the aftermath of the economic crisis, thousands of Southern Europe citizens have turned to local initiatives both to address their needs outside of failed market economy and to foster local solidarity (Sánchez, 2012; Conill et al., 2012). Particularly insightful intellectual and activists' spaces have rescued the concept of 'commons' to think and implement alternative management of common resources beyond state and market, and beyond the false dichotomy of institutional regulations and personal choices (Boiller, 2014).

Everywhere, activists[5] recycle and reuse objects, travel by bike and public transports, reduce their consumption, grow vegetables, buy local food and set up local currencies. They claim to change the world through prefigurative activism, by implementing alternative practices in their daily lives and local communities. Personal commitment to the global age and a more sustainable planet also involves considerable subjective dimensions such as personal resistance against the 'constant formatting by advertisings and the rule of a consumption, competition and constant comparison society' (a young activist in Belgium, interview, 2013)[6]. These activists call themselves 'objectors to growth and speed', and question the economists' monopole over the determination of well-being on the basis of GDP growth (Méda, 2013).

While decreasing consumption and restraining one's choices is constraining in a consumption society, activists put much energy *in reframing*

it (and living it) as happy experience. To be involved in food or environmental movements does not require sacrificing part of one's life for a cause, they insist. On the opposite, activists claim they live 'more intensely' and enjoy 'more authentic pleasures' and happiness. 'It is important to explain to people that it is not a sacrifice. On the contrary, life will actually become better.' (an activist from Sustainable Flatbush, New York City, 2010).

Likewise, 'voluntary simplicity' practices do not only aim at decreasing personal carbon footprint, but also reduces working time and fosters convivial human relations (Schor, 2010; Caillé et al., 2012). Activists seek to 'replaces productivity by conviviality' (Illich, 1973: 28), the anonymity of (super-)market relations by the authenticity of direct relationships between consumers and local producers; the widespread social disaffiliation (Castel, 2003) by renewed social fabric in collective gardens or among bikers.

Analyzing these actors allows us to gain access to some elements of both subjectivity and agency in the global age. On one side, local and convivial environmental movements show glimpses of the internalization of the rules and constraints of the emerging social configuration. We may well expect cultural transformations connected to a shift to the Global Age to be more visible among these activists, prior to a possible dissemination into a broader population. Interviews and fieldwork[7] with young environmental activists have shown how deeply their subjectivity and daily experience are reshaped by the consciousness of the global age and its challenges. It transforms daily practices as private as showers, diets and transport. They share tips to 'micro-shower' and reduce the use of water, eat local and season vegetables. Many have become vegetarians and avoid (or reduce) the use of cars and planes. We may also analyze the impact of an acute awareness of global interdependency and of the constraints of a limited planet on an individual subjectivity and her sense of responsibility. These actors testify to the rise of an ethics of responsibility specific to the global age and essential to a sustainable life on a limited planet (Jonas, 1984; Arnsperger, 2011). It includes more sustainable bonds with nature, along with a different concept of the self and of one's connection to the world.[8]

On the other side, these actors explore various paths of social agency that put life and experience rather than policies at the core of social change. These movements oppose modernization and top-down development perspectives. They rescale life and production, re-thinking the meaning and extend of consumption. From their local territories, these small and local actors contest core values of our society and thereby manifest a global relevance. Local and personal changes and the internalization of constraints of the global age constitute an indispensable element of the adaptation to the global conditions of life on a limited planet and provide social actors with paths for concrete social agency in a global age.

However, pointing to the significance of local movements does not dispense a critical analysis of empirical and structural limits of these forms of social agency. Empirically, the impact of these initiatives and movements remains limited when confronted to a consumer society that seduces millions of newcomers in emerging countries. Analytically, the connection between local or personal change and social transformations at the national and global scales usually remains a blind spot for activists (Pleyers, 2010). Can the world be changed only by multiplying individual conversions or building local 'resilient' communities? Will the multiplication of 'alternative islands' in an ocean of modern capitalist societies manage to alter the system? Or will actors also have to tackle more institutional and political struggles?

Climate Justice NGOs

The 'Climate Justice Movement' is often used as an umbrella for designating the whole set of ecological activists. In this section, I focus on professional activists working in NGOs, endowed with a strong expertise, monitoring and research capacity, but who maintain a contentious perspective on environmental issues and oppose the market-based proposals to deal with climate change.

Climate justice activists' main objective is to *'repoliticise' climate and environmental issues*. They do so by pointing to the strong connection between climate issues and social justice, and by focusing on advocacy and global regulations while claiming some admiration for grassroots struggles and actors. Climate justice (CJ) NGO activists are thus at the crossroads of two confluences which results in tensions and concrete dilemas: social and environmental claims; grassroots and institutional perspectives on social change.

Red and Green: 'Change the System, not the Climate'

The CJ movement emerged from a confluence of social and environmental struggles. It is partly rooted in the 'environmental turn' of the alter-globalization movement in the second half of the 2000s (Bullard and Müller, 2012; Pleyers, 2010: 251–256), which generated lively and committed expert networks and initiatives such as the 'climate action camps'. The repeated clashes between pro- and anti-'market solutions' to global warming among civil society organizations also propelled the birth of the 'climate justice movement'. The 'Climate Justice Now!' network was founded at the UN conference on climate in Bali, in 2007, in opposition to the stance held by the 'Climate Action Network'. The latter was rejected on the grounds that it is dominated by international (mainly Northern)

NGOs that consider carbon trade and market-based solutions as a step towards a more sustainable development. On the contrary, CJ activists denounce carbon trade as a further financiarization of nature (e.g., Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading, 2005), and virulently condemn agrofuels (Houtart, 2010; De Schutter, 2013), 'green washing' and 'green capitalism' (Müller & Passadakis, 2009; Featherstone, 2013). As stated in their main slogan 'System change, not climate change', CJ activists consider that global warming requires structural changes in the economic and development model, rather than adjustments at the margins.

Albrow's global age hypothesis, most of the ecological transition thought (Hopkins, 2011) and some cosmopolitan theories point to a rather consensual shift towards a rising awareness of the unity of humanity. Likewise, scholars and activists maintain (Chakrabarty, 2009) that global warming and environmental damages affect humanity as a whole and consequently lead to a focus on the common destiny of humanity rather than class and national divides. In the opposite, CJ activists point to the contentious dimension of the shift to the global age and to rising social conflicts linked to environmental challenges (Svampa & Antonelli, 2009). They insist that all human beings do not share the same responsibility in global warming and in the destruction of the environment.[9] They point to a differentiated responsibility for industrialized countries and to the richest (7 per cent of mankind account for 50 per cent of the greenhouse gases emissions). Hence, they consider that to tackle global warming and the environmental crisis requires dealing with inequalities, North/South relations and neoliberal globalization.

CJ activists and committed intellectuals merge climate and environmental justice with anti-capitalism frames (Guerrero, 2011; Löwy, 2011; Ceceña, 2013) and often contribute to build a master frame that points to a 'civilization crisis' (Ornelas, 2013) provoked by the capitalist and industrial system or the 'productivist ideology'. Like the Global Age analytical perspective, they maintain that the current environmental challenges cannot be dealt with in the modern economic and development paradigm and requires deep reshaping in the economic system as well as in societies and global governance.

Institutional Civil Society with an Eye of the Grassroots[10]

CJ NGOs are also at the crossroads between institutional and grassroots approaches. On one hand, CJ NGO activists consider perspectives that focus on local change and individual purchasing habits as illusory and limited in scope. CJ 'radical NGOs' invest much of their energy in some of the typical functions of institutionalized civil society actors. They raise public awareness, monitor international institutions and negotiations, draw

up expert reports and conduct advocacy campaigns to convince governments to adopt regulations.

On the other hand, CJ activists constantly denounce 'big environmental NGOs' and oppose both their very top-down institutional approach and their support of market-based solutions. They re-assert the conflictual dimensions of their claims and repeatedly refer to – often idealized – 'grassroots struggles', preferably from the global South.

Their conflictual stance stems from two main sources. First, successive international summits on climate change and the environment (Bali, 2007; Copenhagen, 2009; Cancun, 2010; Rio, 2012…) favoured confluences among North-based environmental NGOs and social movements from the global South, including small farmers, indigenous peoples and delegates from local struggles protesting against state 'development' projects (mines, dams, big plants, highways…). Indigenous peoples' participation and insights from Southern movements were particularly strong at the 2009 World Social Forum in Belem and the 2010 'Peoples' World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth' that gathered 25,000 people from 147 countries in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

The second root of this positioning lies in the activist career (Fillieule, 2009) of 'young adults' now turned into professional NGO activists. A few years ago, they protested against international summits and implemented a horizontal 'alter-activist' culture (Pleyers, 2010: Chapters 2–4). Now working as professional NGOs' activists, they however maintain some suspicion towards 'big environmental NGOs', develop a more contentious approach and contribute to a 'gradual SMO-ization of environmental NGOs… with a growing tendency to participate in less conventional forms of collective action and to express increasingly explicit criticism of EU policies' (Della Porta & Caiani, 2009: 172).

The failure of the UN negotiations on climate in Copenhagen became a new unifying reference for the CJ movement and an apparent turning point in its strategy. The path toward institutional change led by the UN being blocked, CJ activists have decided to focus on the support to grassroots alternatives and struggles against infrastructure projects and extraction industries. However, by claiming that 'change will not come from institutional agreements but from grassroots' actors', CJ NGOs put themselves in an uncomfortable position. First, CJ NGOs *raison d'être* is precisely the conviction that local solutions are not sufficient to deal with global challenges. Secondly, NGOs, even radical ones, are not grassroots actors. They may provide occasional support, expertise or media coverage of local movements, but with the web 2.0, grassroots networks often do not need intermediaries.

The role of CJ NGOs lies in their capacity to connect local environmental struggles (e.g., water movements, protests against a dam…) to international struggles and institutions. '*We have to make them feel that their local struggle is part of something wider*' (a CJ NGO professional, Focus Group, Brussels, 10/2013). This process transforms both the scale (from a local to international) and the meanings of the struggle (from the defence of a local livelihood to environmental justice). Thus, and contrary to many of their discourses, CJ NGOs and activists have not stopped monitoring and lobbying UN and European institutions. The next major governmental Climate Summit in Paris in 2015 is in everyone's head, hopeful it will be conducive to a better tackling of climate justice, or at least that the urgency of environmental challenges will gain impetus thanks to the coverage of the event. In the meantime 'there is one key question: How do we build a global movement for climate, locally based but also global appeal and strategy' (final assembly, 2013 WSF Climate Space).

Conclusion: From the Global Age to Social Movements and Back

The panorama of progressive actors that foster a more responsible shift towards the global age is far from complete. This chapter restrained the scope on some environmental actors, ignoring actors who focus on challenges of democracy or economic regulations in the global age (see Pleyers, 2010). Even among environmentalists actors, green parties and policy makers (Richardson & Rootes, 2006), networks of heterodox economists, local resistances to development projects (mines, dams, airports…) (Svampa & Antonelli, 2009; Srikant, 2009) and 'grassroots environmental alliances' would have deserved a proper analysis.

The aim of this chapter was, however, to illustrate a two-sided heuristic connection between a social configuration and social movements. The global age hypothesis has shed a new light on specific meanings of environmentalist actors. Conversely, analyzing these social movements and their claims provide us with two sources of empirical elements to grasp elements of life, society and public debates *in* this global age, and social agency *towards* the global age.

On one hand, prefigurative movements show the glimpses of life and society in a global age. The shift towards a global age is not only a matter of international negotiations and institutions. While actions and worldviews of policy makers remain largely shaped by the modern context, challenges and constraints, elements of a different social configuration are experienced, lived and produced in the shadow of everyday life, local initiatives and citizen debates. They suggest the rise of an ethics that better

corresponds to the global age. On the other hand, by combining expertise and agency in international negotiations and institutions, with grassroots struggles and bottom-up strategies, environmentalist activists explore innovative strategies to promote habits and public policies more consistent with a finite planet. They provide elements for a multi-dimensional and multi-scalar approach to social change, from local to global, from personal change to institutional regulations.

However, these movements' impact on international negotiations and public policy remains limited compared to the urgency of the challenges. Environmentalist movements are now widespread, but they have not significantly reduced mass consumption and the depletion of natural resources. The economic crisis and quest for economic growth has lowered the interest for environmental issues among Western countries and the rise of China as an economic superpower and environmental super polluter brings about new challenges (Zhang & Barr, 2013). Indeed, there is no system or determinist force sparking towards a smooth and untroubled adaptation to the constraints of the global age and social agency plays on both sides. Counter-movements require a particular attention. Conservative movements promote a modernization perspective and are effectively engaged in maintaining the mainstream model. Urry (2013: Chapter 4) evokes the efficiency of US conservative movements and car and oil companies lobbies in organizing a backlash against environmental movements and values in the 1970s. More recently, the same actors have massively founded climate-sceptics think tanks (Brulle et al., 2013).

The CJ movement also contributes to a major renewing of critical perspectives in a time increasingly shaped by the global age. CJ activists transform the claims of both social and environmental justice. Social justice should include intergenerational justice, environmental and climate debts, redistribution policies at the global level and an *aggiornamento* of Western welfare state, relying on the economic growth that destroys nature and on the exploitation of workers in the South. Therefore, they stress both the need for international regulations and institutions, and inspirations from non-Western knowledge. The combination of these critical approaches and the global age perspective suggest that what is at stake in the current crisis and social movements is modernity itself, both as a utopia, a social organization and an ethos based on a permanent growth. A renewal of the critical perspective thus requires an epistemological shift from the modern roots of social sciences and mainstream worldview (Echeverría, 1995). Empirical studies of actors who prefigurate and foster a transition to a global age thus provide us insightful perspectives to rethink society, regulations, solidarity and emancipation in the 21st century.

Notes

1   Vasi's (2011) excellent book provides a rigorous analysis of the impacts and failures of green movements' strategies on national governments.

2   'Social movement' is a heuristic concept and not an empiric reality. It is 'neither an empirical reality, nor a transcended reality. It is a sociological concept. Historic actor can neither be fully identified to it, nor understood outside of their relation to it' (Touraine, 1965:70).

3   An expected 85 million (see Ramsey & Boudette, 2013).

4   Only a minority of indigenous people and communities are actually involved in initiatives for an alternative way of life (Fontaine, 2006).

5   Many citizens who contribute to these initiatives do not actually consider themselves as 'activists'. 'I do not see it as activism. It is just a change in our way of life' (a Swedish student, 2012).

6   The assertion of activists' subjectivity and authenticity against consumption society plays as a permanent repetition of the Habermas' confrontation between the Lebenswelt and the System.

7   Interviews in France (2009–2012), New York City (2010–2011) and Rio de Janeiro (2013) and sociological interventions (series of focus groups) with young environmentalists in Belgium (2013).

8   Elias' (1969) interdependency between the self and social configuration.

9   See notably the Declaration of the 2002 Climate Justice Summit in Delhi.

10   This section relies notably on the results of a sociological intervention I conducted with Christian Scholl and Priscilla Claeys, both from the University of Louvain, on climate justice activists working in NGOs around the European institutions in Brussels in 2013.

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