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# INTRODUCTION. COP21 AND THE “CLIMATISATION” OF GLOBAL DEBATES

Jean Foyer, Stefan C. Aykut and Edouard Morena

IN Stefan C. AYKUT, Jean FOYER, Edouard MORENA (eds), *Globalising the Climate. COP21 and the climatisation of global debates*, Routledge, 2017, p. 1-18.

Frequently presented as a historic last chance to set the world on a course that prevents catastrophic climate change, the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Climate convention (COP21) held in Paris in December 2015, was a global summit of exceptional proportions: 150 presidents and prime ministers attended the opening ceremony – a record –, some 30.000 registered participants came together in the Le Bourget venue near Paris during the two weeks of the conference. An even greater number of people attended the countless civil society events scattered across the city. From large public gatherings to invitation-only and fairly low-key corporate events, Paris was, to borrow the name of a media hub created for the conference, *the* “place to be” for anyone interested – even marginally – in the climate issue. COP21 was not only a high-stakes conference with an exceptionally high turnout. By bringing together politicians, negotiators, scientists, journalists and representatives of civil society from across the globe, it also constituted a moment and a space where “the global” became local. For any researcher interested in the climate issue, the COP21 event represented a privileged vantage point – an “emblematic instance” as it were – for the study of global climate governance *in the making*.

It goes without saying that climate governance is not restricted to international climate summits or the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It extends “beyond” or “outside” the UN climate regime, through the individual or combined actions of multiple stakeholders and initiatives. These range from regional and national policy actors to intergovernmental bodies, local governments, social movements, corporations, as well as public or private carbon markets and offset schemes (Moncel and van Asselt 2012, Ostrom 2010, Okereke, Bulkeley and Schroeder 2009). While centred on the UNFCCC, the Paris conference produced a “gravitational pull” on a range of actors who were, for the most part, not directly involved in the climate negotiations. In this sense, COP21 offered a unique snapshot of the current state of play in global environmental governance, and the attendant – and at times less discernible – spaces of engagement in the climate debate. The contributions to this edited volume analyse the Paris conference as a “total event”<sup>1</sup>; as a historic moment in which multiple discourses, practices and actor networks came together for the duration of a two-week conference.

## Transnational mega-events and the making of globality

At first glance, COP21 took the form of a three-part drama combining the three classical unities of time, space and action. The space was the Le Bourget conference centre just north of Paris. The time was a two-week period in early December 2015. And the action was the negotiation of an international climate agreement that sets the world on a course to a low-carbon future. Yet, on closer scrutiny, the Paris conference – and other comparable transnational mega-events for that matter – broke away from its formal timeframe, space and action agenda.

As with a number of other international processes, climate conferences are organised yearly in different host cities.<sup>2</sup> Like a travelling circus, the climate COP has to be rebuilt from scratch as it moves from one venue to the next. Having said this, COPs do have some basic things in common. They systematically include a “blue zone” where access is restricted to registered participants. In addition to hosting the negotiations, the “blue zone” also houses an exhibition space (for countries, NGOs, IGOs and businesses), meeting rooms for side events, delegation and observer offices, a media centre and amenities such as cafeterias and restaurants. Civil society gatherings and events that target a wider audience are organised outside of the blue zone. Infrastructures and venue capacities vary depending on the host country and the conference’s importance – for the host country and the UNFCCC. In Paris for example, the blue zone, the semi-official civil society space *Espaces Générations Climat* and the business forum *La Galerie* were all in Le Bourget, a city that is located in the northern and working-class Parisian suburb of Seine Saint-Denis. The conference’s location on the outskirts of Paris heightened a sense of proximity between the *Générations Climat* space and the official conference while simultaneously widening the gap between the conference and the countless events taking place inside Paris. These included, among others, a large gathering of climate movement actors in Montreuil, a city just East of Paris, and at the *Centquatre*, an artistic space in the city’s 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement district. A business event, *Solutions COP21*, was also organised in the more affluent West of the city. As with other international summits, the Paris COP expanded outward through a series of concentric circles from the negotiations space in Le Bourget to various locations across the city and its surroundings.

These physical spaces are generally associated with social spaces; spaces that can be understood as “relatively autonomous spaces of practice and meaning within the social world, and at the heart of which mobilisations are united by relations of interdependence” (Mathieu 2007). UN mega-conferences connect a wide array of more or less autonomous and homogenous spaces within which diverse actors do very different things. Although there is a high degree of interaction between them, different spaces can nevertheless be identified. These include, among others, a negotiations space, a civil society space, a business space and a media space. The existence of these spaces further challenges the three classical unities – time, space and mentioned above.

Since their beginnings, UN climate conferences’ “nomadic” character generated a distinctive form of political globality that resonates with the globality of the prevailing scientific framing

of the climate problem (Aykut and Dahan 2015). This aspect of climate governance reminds us of Marc Augé's (1995) notion of "non-places", which he uses to describe the ahistorical and interchangeable localities of our transport (motorways, airports, hotels) and consumption infrastructures (shopping malls, supermarkets) so characteristic of globalisation in the age of "supermodernity". For Augé, non-places signal a break with more classical sociological and anthropological representations of place as "culture localized in time and space" (Augé 1995, 34). Hence, UN conferences share some common characteristics with non-places. Like shopping malls, successive climate conferences reproduce the same delocalised spatial and organisational arrangements. Like airports, they are detached from their surroundings through physical barriers and security checks. Like hotels, they are spaces of transit that are essentially defined by the functions that they accomplish. The venues of climate conferences are the *infrastructure* of what is commonly referred to as "global governance". Akin to the "pneumatic parliaments" described by Peter Sloterdijk's in his scathing account of attempts to "export" Western democracy in the George W. Bush years (Sloterdijk et Mueller von der Hagen 2005), climate conferences project the norms and principles of a UN-led global democratic order in very different local contexts. This is not without creating a series of rather paradoxical situations – one only needs to look at the debates that surrounded the Doha climate conference (COP18) in Qatar, an absolute monarchy that applies Sharia law and has the highest per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the world. The fact that the "global circus" of climate conferences can accommodate such contradictions is in itself an interesting feature of global climate governance.

That being said, climate conferences differ from Augé's non-places in various ways. Unlike shopping malls, they are not ahistorical but carry with them a particular negotiation history consisting in successive cycles, landmark conferences, breakthroughs and disillusionments. Unlike airports, they tend to attract the same group of people year upon year. Through their spatial arrangements, they also encourage interactions among participants (doorway encounters and informal exchanges over coffee or lunch). And unlike hotels, they do foster a certain level of local "colouration" depending on the conference's host city and country. COPs also convey a particular set of norms – diplomatic language and civility, formal debating rules – and procedures that are characteristic of UN settings.

Hence, repeated encounters, a common history and shared norms have contributed to the rise of a "climate community" with its own codes, practices and language; a community that not only comes together annually at climate COPs, but also assembles during smaller and more low-ley "intersessional" meetings at the UNFCCC's headquarters in Bonn, Germany. This community is not confined to country delegates but extends to a variety of non-state actors who are active both inside and outside of the official negotiation space. This is a consequence of multiple factors. Among them is the fact that Northern NGOs have historically provided crucial support to country delegations from the Global South. We also witness a high level of individual mobility between NGOs, think tanks, business associations and national delegations. COPs are therefore characterised by their multiple levels of historicity and protracted temporalities – those of negotiation cycles, civil society and business mobilisations -, as well as the progressive emergence of what can be labelled as a global climate culture.

This historicity has a complex relationship with climate COPs as international mega-events. While COPs are all events in the organisational sense of the term, they are not all, far from it, historic events. The Paris climate conference clearly stood out when compared to the series of COPs that preceded it since Copenhagen (COP15). It was supposed to mark the conclusions of a negotiation cycle and produce an international agreement that would form the basis for climate action in the coming decades. In addition to this, the COP organisers and architects of the final agreement, with support from global media and communications outlets, construed COP21 as an international mega-event of historic proportions. Through its performative power, the Paris conference was supposed to generate “momentum” for action on climate change among state and non-state actors – and in particular to send clear signals for businesses and investors that the world was irreversibly shifting towards a low carbon future.

The preceding paragraphs signal how transnational mega-events like the Paris climate conference cannot be simply boiled down to the international negotiation process. To fully capture what is at stake in international climate debates, research on climate governance must go beyond the negotiation process and its formal outputs – treaties, decisions or declarations. Seyfang and Jordan (2002), for instance, show how the functions of environmental mega-conferences extend beyond the legal documents that they produce: they set global agendas, connect problems, shape common principles, create spaces that allow for the emergence of global leadership, promote capacity building, and contribute to legitimise global institutions. Through their ethnographic research, institutional anthropologists have also shown how international negotiations contribute to the production and diffusion of shared norms and understandings (Bendix 2012, Randeria 2003). They have also highlighted their *performative* function in that climate conferences project the idea that there does exist a “global community” that addresses the world’s problems (Müller 2013, Little 1995). Building on these and other analyses, the contributions in this volume combine pragmatist approaches to the study of international relations with sociological and anthropological perspectives on climate governance. In doing so, they frame COP21 as an event that simultaneously *reflects* our global condition, and *produces* a specific form of globality.

## **Climatising the world, globalising the climate**

In light of these debates, contributions to this edited volume examine COP21 as an arena where new framings of global problems, approaches to global governance and actor coalitions are tried and tested; framings, approaches and coalitions whose effects transcend the climate arena. Climate conferences take up an ever-growing number of issues, from debates about development, energy and forests, to biodiversity, global inequality and urban planning, among others. In return, they attract a growing number of actors from very different backgrounds and who each have their own interpretations of the climate problem, its causes and possible solutions.

This points to a broader two-way shift in the global climate debate. On the one hand, we are witnessing a *globalisation of the climate* problem through the inclusion of new issues and actors into the climate regime (Aykut et Dahan 2015). This globalisation is more sectorial

than spatial, as it mainly relates to the extension of the climate problem to other domains (even if this territorial dimension is also important). On the other hand, a *climatisation of the world* can be observed, whereby actors present particular issues that were formerly unrelated to the climate regime through a ‘climatic lens’ (J. Foyer 2016). This leads to the alignment of different topics on the climate problem, and to their treatment according to the dominant logics and practices of the climate regime.<sup>3</sup>

Both processes are interwoven and dialogical since the globalisation of the climate presupposes the climatisation of new topics and vice versa. They can subsequently be viewed as forming two sides of the same coin, observed alternatively from within the climate regime or from its periphery. They are translation<sup>4</sup> processes that extend, on the one hand, from within the climate arena to a particular topic or area, and, on the other, from a particular topic to the climate arena. While closely related, both movements abide by distinct logics and do not always involve the same actors. Thus, the climatisation of an issue by actors outside the climate regime may or may not lead to its effective inclusion in climate talks. Inversely, the integration of a new topic in climate governance does not necessarily affect its treatment in other governance contexts. The chapters provide some examples for such processes of incomplete or partial climatisation. Having said this, the dialogical movement presented above can be synthesised through two questions: what does the climate regime *do* to other issue areas as it expands to and integrates an ever-increasing number of topics in international politics? And what do these other issue areas *do* to the climate regime, as they enter the global climate debate?

These questions can be supplemented by a series of more crosscutting ones: for instance, can we distinguish different forms and intensities of climatisation? What are the driving forces behind these dynamics and how – according to which logics and social processes – do they unfold? What are the obstacles to both the climatisation of new topics and to their inclusion in formal climate talks? How does it affect the ways climate change is made ‘governable’ in climate talks? Last but by no means least, do the two processes – the globalisation of the climate and the climatisation of the world – get us any closer to actually solving the climate problem?

## **Modes and degrees of climatisation**

In Paris, the dialogical process of climatisation of the world and globalization of the climate was operating at its fullest. COP21 simultaneously represented the high point of a long term process and acted as an extraordinary “climatising machine”. Indeed, over the years and months leading up to the conference, the climate debate was expanded to include a variety of new topics such as security, agriculture and financial regulation, while simultaneously consolidating existing links to others, such as development, fossil fuel regulation, traditional knowledge and indigenous rights. By closely monitoring the event and its preparations, we were able to further understand and describe the climatisation process, to study its contours depending on the issue area, and assess its wider bearing on global debates. It thus appeared that climatisation can be more or less pronounced and take on a variety of different forms

over time and in different domains. Through their focus areas and methodologies, the chapters in this book set out to capture the climatisation and globalisation processes in all their complexity. They do so in three main ways:

A first group of chapters highlights the climatisation process's "selectivity", i.e. its variability and unequal intensity depending on the issue area. The first chapter deals with the heart of the climate regime. Stefan Aykut analyses the climate negotiations as a collective drafting exercise, in which text editing activities are distributed across time and space. Examined through this lens, COP21 simultaneously appears as an occasion, for a variety of actors, to lobby for the inclusion of new issues and topics into climate talks, and as a highly efficient cleansing device where climate change is rendered "governable" through the deliberate omission of certain issues and alternative approaches to the problem. Chapter nine further elaborates on this theme by providing an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of selective climatisation in a specific policy domain: fossil fuel regulation. Stefan Aykut and Monica Castro show how debates on energy – and in particular on fossil fuels – are in many ways "hyper-climatised" but surprisingly absent from the discussions and negotiations under the UNFCCC. The analysis of this "energy paradox" reveals that institutional logics and deliberate strategies of major actors in climate governance conspired historically to keep energy issues out of negotiation texts. In chapter six on security and migration, Lucile Maertens and Alice Baillat show how both issues are increasingly framed in "climatic terms" and how this, in turn, contributes to a "dramatization" and "humanisation" of the climate crisis. The authors also contend, however, that the integration of security and migration in climate talks is incomplete and partial, as strong political and institutional obstacles prevent their treatment in one single international arena.

A second set of chapters focuses on the climatisation process's political and strategic dimensions. In chapter two, H el ene Guillemot explores the changing relations between science and politics in the climate regime. In her description of the process that resulted in the adoption of a 1.5 C long term temperature goal that is deemed "necessary" from a political perspective, but already "inaccessible" from a scientific point of view, she examines how the scientific community struggles to adapt to this objective and cope with the pressure to align research agendas on the demands of global climate politics. In chapter eight, Jean Foyer and David Dumoulin explore the process that led to the inclusion of a reference to "traditional knowledge" in the adaptation section of the Paris agreement. They show that this inclusion is the result of a long history of mobilisation by indigenous actors. The climatisation of traditional knowledge, they claim, contributes to "re-enchant" the climate arena, but it also comes at a cost, as traditional knowledge loses some of its more radical implications in terms of indigenous rights or alternative cosmologies. The political and strategic dimension of climatisation is also present in Edouard Morena's account of philanthropic foundations' involvement in the climate debate. In chapter five, he analyses how a small group of liberal foundations played a pro-active but discrete role in orchestrating the final outcome of the conference and in generating the larger "momentum" that surrounded the conference. Foundations thus appear as key actors in the trend toward climatisation. Finally, through their analysis of two mechanisms – the REDD+ scheme to avoid emissions from deforestation and

forest degradation, and the instruments of climate adaptation finance – Aurore-Viard Crétat and Christophe Buffet show how climate change is used and mobilized to re-label existing practices and institutions of development aid. The climatisation of development thus appears, at least partially, as a strategic move to generate new legitimacy for this much-criticised and central feature of North-South relations.

A third group of chapters addresses the ambiguities of climatisation. In chapter three, Birgit Müller, Sarah Benabou and Nils Moussu analyse the private sectors' efforts to project a unified and “progressive” voice in Paris. This global political ambition was however overshadowed by differing – and at times conflicting – assessments of the climate crisis and its implications for the private sector, as well as by a voluntary vagueness concerning the concrete shape of regulatory solutions to the climate problem. The climatisation process's ambiguity is also illustrated in Joost de Moor, Edouard Morena and Jean-Baptiste Comby's analysis (chapter four) of the climate movement's involvement in and around the conference. The authors show that that a central issue for social movements and NGOs was to situate oneself in relation to the negotiation process. Finding the “appropriate distance” between lobbying inside COP21 and bottom-up activism that participates in the broader climatisation process, was a central element of activists' strategies in Paris.

It goes without saying that the chapters contained in this book do not cover all the objects, spaces and actors that have been or are in the process of being climatised. Other objects such as agriculture – through climate smart agriculture (CSA) – and religion – through Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* encyclical or the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change –, among others, would also require further investigation.

### **Interpreting climatisation: its origins, meanings, and limitations**

To fully grasp the multi-faceted process of climatisation, we must also understand its origins, examine its wider implications and analyse its limitations. A first step in this direction is to make sense of the climate regime's force of attraction. The most obvious explanation of this attraction relates to the seriousness and scale of the climate problem. Climate change is the most emblematic feature of what scientists and historians call the Anthropocene<sup>5</sup>, the current geological epoch in which Humanity acts as the driving force behind the transformations of the Earth's biosphere and lithosphere. Over the past twenty years, global warming has become more palpable, be it through the melting of icecaps, rising sea levels, the disruption of local climate patterns or the growing number of extreme weather events. Given its scale and scope, state and non-state actors as well as ordinary citizens are increasingly enticed to recognise the seriousness of the situation and the urgent need to take action. However, the scale of the climate problem does not by itself explain the climate regime's formidable force of attraction. Among the other factors that need to be examined are the climate regime's long-term dynamics and what can be termed an “institutional snowball effect”: the more the climate regime grows, the greater its force of attraction.

As a consequence of its growing appeal, the international climate regime has become a place in which to be seen and heard in order to advance personal and organisational agendas, expand networks, and raise funds. Climate change is therefore no longer framed exclusively as a scientific and political problem of global proportions, but also and more significantly as a problem that has the power to break down the barriers that traditionally separate science, the environment, politics and the economy. By merging together intersecting and overlapping social, political, and environmental issues, the climate plays a “totemic” function that brings together a variety of actors with different agendas and worldviews. It also turned into a global controversy that opposes competing understandings of the planet’s socio-ecological system. In a similar vein to “atomic energy” in the 1980s and “globalisation” in the 1990s, it has become a “hypnotic focal point” and a metaphor for the world’s most serious problems and predicaments, from North-South inequalities and questions of global equity to ideological struggles about industrial modernity and its impasses.

From a historical perspective, climatisation can be interpreted as the most recent and now dominant form of “environmentalisation” (Buttel 1992). The rise of climate change coincides with the surge of the “global environment” as a scientific and political category (Yearly 1996, Ingold 2000). As with environmentalism, climatisation can take on different ideological colorations, from more radical critiques against the growth paradigm and “fossil capitalism” (Altvater 2007), to more reformist calls for a “greening [of] modernity” (Beck 2010) by reflexively readjusting its core institutions to tackle the ecological crisis, and to policies focusing on incremental change through market- and technology-based solutions.

Climatisation also contributes to further marginalise or overshadow other important environmental concerns. By focusing almost exclusively on climate change, there is a risk of diverting the general public and policy-makers’ attention away from other important global environmental problems and planetary boundaries (Rockström, et al. 2009). Climate mitigation efforts that minimise or omit other environmental challenges can have unintended and undesirable social and ecological consequences. Afforestation efforts or plantations for biomass production, for instance, can lead to a loss in biodiversity, the depletion of freshwater resources and the forced displacement of local populations. Climate change is without doubt a major and possibly the most important issue of our time, but it is by no means the only global problem requiring our urgent attention.

That being said, we should not exaggerate the scale of climatisation nor overestimate its durability or robustness over time. It remains a very partial and fragmented process. A number of issues – including vitally important ones like fossil fuel regulation – have resisted the climate regime’s gravitational force. Furthermore, when analysing the climatisation process in Paris, it is important to factor in the conference’s historic and exceptional character. The space of two weeks, the climate issue held centre stage, momentarily relegating other global concerns to the side-lines (war, terrorism, the global economic crisis). Thus, Paris projected an exaggerated sense of climatisation that does not reflect the actual situation. By recently declaring that his country would not honour its commitment to the Paris agreement, the new president of the Philippines, Duterte, offers a potent reminder of climatisation’s

incompleteness. Several public statements of the Republican candidate for the US Presidency Donald Trump point in the same direction. This highlights the fact that the climatisation produced through Paris can be reversed.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, climatisation should not be confused with the actual measures put in place to address the climate problem. Climatisation is above all a symbolic and discursive process. Interpreting COP21 in terms of the climatisation of the world does not contradict analyses of the climate regime in terms of a growing “schism of reality” – seen as the rift that separates the climate regime from the geopolitical, economic and environmental realities of the world (Aykut et Dahan 2014, Dahan 2016). Following COP21, The climate regime continues to be isolated from other international institutions and processes – that regulate global trade, energy supply or finance. It also continues to move at very slow pace when compared to a range of other global processes, especially economic and financial globalisation (S. C. Aykut 2016). The current focus on market-based solutions (Lohmann 2005) and technological fixes (Hamilton 2013) marginalises alternative approaches to global problems that highlight the need for more profound socioeconomic transformations. The idea that unbridled economic growth is compatible with climate mitigation continues to dominate the international agenda (Vogler 2016, 26-28)

These remarks serve to further qualify the historical meaning and origins of the climatisation process. Indeed, climatisation can be understood as an indirect consequence of the climate regime’s failure to address some of the root causes of global warming, such as fossil fuel extraction and combustion or the intensification of economic and financial globalisation. In other words, climatisation can simultaneously be seen as a response to a worsening climate problem that increasingly affects other issues and domains, and as an effort to broaden the scope of climate action precisely because of our failure to tackle its root causes.

## **Making sense of the “paradigm shift” in global governance**

Beyond the climatisation process, the Paris conference signalled a much-discussed “paradigm shift” in global climate governance; a paradigm shift that translates into a bottom-up, voluntary approach to climate action where sending the right “signals” to economic actors and building “momentum” in society become just as important as the multilateral negotiations themselves. This is a remarkable evolution, as the climate regime has been frequently criticized for its “globalism” and its tendency to downgrade human experiences, erase territorial specificities and disempower local communities (Jasanoff 2010, Jasanoff 2001). While globalism continues to form a core element of international climate politics, there are signs of a trend toward a “de-globalisation” (in the territorial and political sense) of the climate regime. To begin with, COP21 marked a clear attempt at highlighting the role of bottom-up and local-level action, especially through its focus on indigenous and frontline communities (chapter eight), corporate initiatives (chapter three) and the work of cities and local authorities (that were particularly present during the Paris COP).<sup>6</sup> This greater focus on and promotion of the local level went hand in hand with a reaffirmation of the role of states. Along with the traditional calls by Southern countries to abide by the principles of “common

but differentiated responsibilities” and national sovereignty, the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) mark both a major institutional innovation for the climate regime and a form of renationalisation of climate policies. While INDCs’ bottom-up character has the potential to induce real change, their non-binding and voluntary character means that there is no way of ensuring that countries abide by their commitments.

If nation-states continue to play a central role in the climate regime, COP21 also reaffirmed the principles of multi-stakeholder governance. In a post-Paris world, achieving the agreement’s long-term targets – keeping global warming below 2°C (and aiming 1.5°C) and reaching 100 billion of annual climate finance for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries – no longer depends on states alone. Quite at the contrary, attaining these objectives requires all sections of the “international community” to ramp up their climate actions, including non-state actors, both in the Global North and South. The consequence is a gradual shift in the global climate regime’s centre of gravity away from the UNFCCC, and toward a more decentralised governance architecture. Climatisation subsequently appears as not just a historic process, but also as a political tool in support of this new, decentralised mode of governance whereby multiple state, inter-state and non-state actors combine and align their efforts in order to reach a mutually agreed objective.

An additional feature of this new approach to climate governance is the promotion of less directive, “soft” methods of government. By referring to the Paris agreement as a “self-fulfilling prophecy”, Laurence Tubiana, head of the French delegation, points to the regime’s shift away from the Kyoto approach – centred on legally-binding emissions reductions commitments – towards a “soft law” approach to climate governance centred on voluntary and non-binding commitments.<sup>7</sup> By setting an ambitious long-term goal without legally binding reduction commitments, the Paris agreement can be labelled as a “performative” agreement. For its architects and promoters, the agreement’s primary function is to send the right signals and generate the momentum required for ambitious and decisive climate action by state and non-state actors alike – and in particular businesses and investors. The focus on “climate solutions” and showcasing of success stories of climate action at the different business spaces and events in Paris as well as through the UNFCCC’s Non-state Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA, former Lima-Paris Action Agenda) are illustrative of this shift away from a “command and control” approach to international law. In the name of pragmatism, the regulation-sanction combination, grounded on clear targets and timeframes, has been replaced by voluntary pledges and regular review cycles. This approach is justified by its promoters by the belief that a non-binding agreement built on confidence and goodwill has a greater chance of rallying parties and thereby producing tangible results.

In sum, the US approach to climate governance has finally triumphed in Paris (Aykut et Dahan 2014). It should be noted however that this approach was also backed by a number of developing countries that preferred to voluntarily commit to mitigation actions rather than to have policies dictated to them by the COP. This trend towards a “softening” of international law is neither new nor specific to the climate debate. It already permeated the different multilateral environmental agreements signed in the 1990s (Maljean-Dubois 2005), as well as

the instruments set up to govern techno-scientific objects (Pestre 2014) and market standards. Having said this, the Paris agreement can nevertheless be seen as a high point for this approach to international law. The climate regime subsequently appears as a laboratory where new forms of global governance are tried and tested. This makes scholarly accounts of climate governance, especially those that go beyond an analysis of the negotiation process, all the more urgent and timely.

## **A collaborative methodology**

Our introduction to this volume would not be complete without a brief presentation of the project that gave rise to it. In particular our work has focused on collaborative research methods.

“The ethnographic delimiting of a mega-event is also problematic due to its complexity and fragmentary nature. When confronted with a conglomeration of over 30,000 people, from over 100 countries, that lasts for two weeks and is wired into a worldwide network of communications and transportation technologies, the illusion of capturing the ‘essence’ of such a complex event is painstakingly revealed.”

This is how Paul Little (1995, 281) described the difficulty of conducting ethnographic fieldwork at the UN Conference on the Environment and Development, or “Earth Summit”, in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The same, of course, holds true for COP21, a conference of analogous proportions and political significance, with equally blurred spatial and temporal boundaries. The multiplication of such transnational mega-events since the Earth Summit – the Johannesburg (2002) and Rio+20 (2012) summits, annual climate conferences, biodiversity conferences and World Social Forums, to name just a few – has given rise to an expanding social science literature on the ways of using and adapting fieldwork methodologies to adequately capture the “essence” of such events.<sup>8</sup> In the process, this research also contributes to wider discussions on the specific challenges that globalisation poses for social science research (Marcus 1995, Markowitz 2001, Siméant 2015, Appadurai 1997).

These reflections have contributed to direct scholarly attention towards collaborative research methodologies. Such collective inquiries have been conducted – and reflected upon – for example by a collective of French researchers from Sorbonne University at the World Social Forums in Nairobi 2007 and Dakar 2011 (Pommerolle et Siméant 2008, Siméant, Sommier et Pommerolle 2015) and by a North American group of political ecology scholars that studied the World Conservation Summit and a biodiversity COP (Brosius et Campbell 2010, Campbell, et al. 2014). Both cases provide ample and compelling evidence that working in larger teams helps to better capture the diversity of actors, events and spaces of interaction, the complexity and range of issues, as well as the countless temporal and spatial overflows that are so characteristic of global governance processes. However, as Campbell and colleagues (2014) explain in an article presenting their “collaborative event ethnography” framework, collaboration does more than just address the “limits of working“ alone by providing “more eyes” to better coverage of the event. If conducted properly, collaboration

also provides “more ideas”, as the practical benefits of working together are complemented by the intellectual benefits of crossing analyses and collectively elaborating hypotheses and a common research framework (Campbell, et al. 2014, 10).

This last point was especially relevant to our research. Our conceptual framework was the product of earlier collaborations and the subsequent coming together of two research teams. The first team, a group of researchers working on biodiversity and agriculture governance, and the role and involvement of various actors such as indigenous peoples, NGOs, trade unions and business groups, mobilized a collaborative methodology approach to observe and analyse the Rio+20 Summit on Sustainable Development in 2012 (J. Foyer 2015). The second team, a group of researchers from the Centre Alexandre Koyré (EHESS Paris), had conducted a series of sociological observations at climate conferences and developed a strong expertise on questions related to climate governance.<sup>9</sup> This led to two parallel analyses of the climate debates: while members of the first team specializing in areas not directly related to climate change observed the climate regime’s growing influence on their objects of study, the second group witnessed how the climate regime increasingly took on new issues (Aykut et Dahan 2015). The idea that climate governance in general and the Paris conference in particular could be analysed as part of a broader trend towards the climatisation of the world and the globalisation of the climate subsequently arose out of earlier discussions between members of both groups who subsequently went on to form the ClimaCop project.

With COP21 approaching, the research team grew through the integration of PhD candidates and postdoctoral fellows interested in the COP21. The result is a fairly young research collective of approximately twenty researchers representing a variety of different institutions, disciplines (political science, sociology, anthropology, history) as well as specialities and theoretical groundings (Science and Technology Studies, Political Sociology, Anthropology of international institutions, International Relations, Political Economy, Political Ecology).<sup>10</sup> Such diversity logically required adopting an interdisciplinary approach that is structured by a common interest in global environmental governance. If shedding light on the same object through multiple perspectives constitutes an analytical advantage, it also represents a methodological challenge requiring constant discussions on theoretical and methodological issues.<sup>11</sup> To sum up, the object of study as much as the composition of our team encouraged us to adopt a collaborative methodology and to turn its development and improvement into a permanent preoccupation throughout the project’s lifecycle. This collaboration took different forms before, during and after COP21.

Monthly project meetings and regular research seminars at the Centre Alexandre Koyré played an important team-building role. They were an opportunity to discuss organisational and substantive research questions. This contributed to a common project culture among project members and enhanced interactions with other members of the research community. Internal and external communication was enhanced through the use of web-based tools, such as a project mailing list, a file hosting system – or cloud – to share relevant information and primary data, and a website to showcase the project’s work, events and output.<sup>12</sup> Collaborative fieldwork began before COP21 since members of our team observed different

preparatory meetings such as the Climate and Business Summit in Paris in May 2015, an intermediate negotiation session in Bonn in June 2015 and the scientific conference Our Common Future Under Climate Change organised in Paris in July 2015.

Logistical and organisational issues were a permanent concern, especially when it came to fieldwork access. Indeed, a specific challenge associated with research in UN settings relates to getting hold of accreditations to access the blue zone, where negotiations and most side-events were taking place. This was complicated by the drastic access limitations imposed by the UNFCCC secretariat prior to COP21 and by the fact that most of our academic institutions were not officially recognized stakeholders. Despite our exchanges with various accredited institutions as well as the French COP presidency, a majority of researchers in the ClimaCop team still had no access to the conference on the eve of the conference. It was only at the start of the COP that most of the team was able to get hold of a badge through NGOs (including a Youth and a Pygmy organisation!), trade-unions or national delegations (France, Cameroun, Bangladesh). This indicates that collaboration through the activation and sharing of personal networks can help to overcome recurring difficulties in studying international events, such as the issue of access to fieldwork.

During the observation stage at COP21, an apartment was rented close to the Gare du Nord station. The apartment offered team members who didn't live in Paris quick and easy access to the different field sites outside and inside Paris. It also acted as a project hub to plan, organise and coordinate activities during the two-week conference. Regular team briefings were essential in order to get a clearer sense of who was observing what and what was happening. Team members could share observations, practical information about events, and discuss emerging research hypotheses. The apartment was also a useful venue to informally interact with other fellow researchers who were present in Paris. Another important collaborative tool was a standardised observation form for fieldwork notes, intended to offer general information about observed events (title, speakers, public, format, etc.), and details about their content. Over 150 forms were completed over the course of the COP.

Possibly the most important scientific benefit of collaboration during COP21 was what we called the “permanent-seminar effect”. In addition to the planned briefings, discussions among team members continued at meal times, during journeys or breaks. Project members were thus constantly encouraged to share their observations, methods and perspectives. The efforts required to synthesise collected information and observations for other team members and to confront different points of view helped to strengthen work hypotheses and fostered the emergence of new research questions.

After the conference, the challenge was to preserve the collaborative dynamic in the output phase. We continued to organise monthly meetings and seminars, while focusing our efforts on writing. Two months after the COP, a writing workshop was organised to discuss the COP and possible hypotheses. Those discussions formed the basis for the present book. In July 2016, a second workshop was organised to present and discuss draft chapters. This

collaborative reviewing process allowed authors to appropriate the general lines of the book and reinforced the structure and coherence the main arguments.

Finally, as coordinators, we paid constant and very specific attention to an essential ingredient for successful collaboration: conviviality. This ingredient does not appear in methodological guides nor obeys to scientific rules. While one cannot decree conviviality, it does not suddenly appear either; it must be nurtured. Collaborative research projects are above all human endeavours and conviviality acts as an essential means of improving working relations and assuring overall intellectual coherence. We very much hope that this is reflected throughout the book.

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<sup>1</sup> This notion has been coined by F Pieke (1996) to describe the Chinese Tiananmen demonstration of 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Exceptions are intermediate negotiations (or "intersessions") that mostly take place in Bonn, Germany, where the secretariat of the Climate Convention is located.

<sup>3</sup> A similar argument has been made by academics working on "securitization" (Wæver 1995, Buzan, Wæver et De Wilde 1998) of different issue areas. Following this line of work, Oels (2012) has analysed the securitisation of climate change and the climatisation of security. Our volume aims at developing and systematising this approach.

<sup>4</sup> We use this notion in the sense of Actor-Network Theory. See Callon (1986) and the contributions in Akrich et al. (2006).

<sup>5</sup> For the scientific debate, see Crutzen (2002) and Steffen et al. (2015). A historical and political perspective is provided by Bonneuil and Fressoz (2016).

<sup>6</sup> Consider, for instance, the Climate Summit for Local Leaders, organized on December 4 in Paris, which brought together some 700 representatives of local government and the mayors of the world's major cities.

<sup>7</sup> Losson, Christian, "COP21: 'L' accord doit être une prophétie autoréalisatrice", *Libération*, 17.12.2015.

<sup>8</sup> See the special issues of *Global Environmental Politics* (2014, Vol.14, No.3) and *Critique Internationale* (Vol.2012/1, No.54), especially the respective introductions by Campbell and colleagues (2014) and Müller (2012).

<sup>9</sup> See the different reports from the COP observation project led by Amy Dahan, e.g. Dahan et al. (2012).

<sup>10</sup> A limit our research project is that it is almost entirely composed of researchers from the Global North (despite the fact that some of the researchers have a long-standing engagement in research in the Global South).

<sup>11</sup> An important moment in these discussions was a workshop on methodological questions relating to the study of transnational mega-events, organized in Paris in July 2015. See <https://climacop.hypotheses.org/evenements/131-2>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://climacop.hypotheses.org/>.