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The Mediterranean Region under Climate Change. A Scientific Update: Abridged English/French Version

IRD Éditions

Postface. From Paris to Marrakesh. Rediscovering universalism

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DOI: 10.4000/books.irdeditions.24651

Publisher: IRD Éditions

Place of publication: Marseille

Year of publication: 2016

Published on OpenEdition Books: November 19, 2018

Series: Synthèses

Electronic EAN: 9782709922555



<http://books.openedition.org>

Electronic reference

EL YAZAMI, Driss. *Postface. From Paris to Marrakesh. Rediscovering universalism* In: *The Mediterranean Region under Climate Change. A Scientific Update: Abridged English/French Version* [online]. Marseille: IRD Éditions, 2016 (generated 19 octobre 2023). Available on the Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/irdeditions/24651>>. ISBN: 9782709922555. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.irdeditions.24651>.

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Postface

From Paris to Marrakesh

Rediscovering universalism

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The Paris agreement, adopted to great acclaim, marks a clear turning point in the long battle against the effects of climate change. No matter what reservations some people may voice, the international community has finally witnessed the acceptance of a multilateral framework accepted by countries with clearly divergent medium-term interests. It sets forth goals, including financial goals, but those objectives still need to be further defined, and steps for evaluation and revision still must be mapped out. It is clear that nothing can be taken for granted. The process of signing the agreement will be revealing in that regard. Nonetheless, the legal framework developed in Paris seems to have created real momentum.

Even more significant, in my opinion, are the signs of universal mobilization seen before, during, and after the Paris Summit.

For years, the battle for a transition to renewable energy has mainly been led by scientists, environmentalist non-governmental organizations, and a few international political figures, but today it seems to have gained new allies, and the expansion of the movement seems indisputable. Alongside these historically involved ‘experts’, new actors have signed up to the cause or have become more actively engaged in innovation, including development NGOs, businesses, regional and local governments, movements associated with various social forums, and others. Their growing involvement, though it can sometimes be hard to define, bears witness to the universal realization of the dangers climate

change poses to the entire human race and of the true urgency with which an alternative policy must be adopted, one that is common to all parties (countries, social and economic actors, etc.), and that, while respecting the diversity of those parties, is still a product of their combined efforts and ideas.

I see this as highly promising news.

This interest in climate issues and the belief that everyone must respond in tandem are developing in a world which seems, almost everywhere, to have turned its back on universalism. In all parts of the world, those who subscribe to ideas of cultural, religious, or national ‘specificity’ seem to be riding high. No matter the particularities of a country’s national history, ‘the ancestors redouble their ferocity’ (Kateb Yacine) and an emphasis is being placed on ‘roots’ — to the detriment of the universal values of human rights and the human rights movement, active notably since the end of World War II. The globalization of human rights seemed irreversible, but it is being attacked and undermined from all sides. Populist parties in Europe are calling for national bias and close-mindedness towards others. In the Muslim world, but in the Americas and India as well, religious references are being exploited. Devotees of ethnic ‘purity’ are everywhere. Mythical origins are being glorified, in opposition to the need for human brotherhood and the imperative of a universal solidarity that extends to the most vulnerable peoples and individuals.

It is against this backdrop that mobilization on climate change and the growing interest in environmental problems are extremely timely.

Of course, this mobilization is not the first of its kind. Major international movements rallying crowds across the world around a single cause have already occurred, and some remain active today. Internationalism was not born of the climate movement momentum. However, in this particular historic moment, it is the cause itself behind this mobilization that seems both new and promising.

All life on Earth is threatened, and to save it, countries, political regimes, and all other actors alike must respond together. Not a single part of the world can still be solely self-sufficient and avoid disaster. Even though historic responsibilities and the effects to come are unequally distributed, we must respond together. The climate emergency requires us, in a way, to ‘remake humanity’.

Of course, overcoming this challenge requires us to raise public awareness, negotiate agreements (like the one in Paris), define the ways and means of implementation, and finally, mobilize all actors, in all their diversity. However, to do so we especially need a shared foundation of values which transcend national self-interest and any temptation to retreat. As we face different forms of relativism, we must identify the ‘inviolable foundation of rights’ (Mireille Delmas-Marty) that will provide a universal basis for the current climate movements and, at the same time, create an unprecedented space for action in favour of universalism and human rights.