Time and place in climate activism: Three urgency-induced debates

Joost de Moor, Stockholm University, joost.demoor@statsvet.su.se

Abstract

While comparisons across space are rare in literature on climate movements, time has long featured centrally in it – albeit often implicitly. The climate movement is fundamentally shaped by the temporality of its main concern: climate change will have irreversible consequences that will become inevitable as soon as tipping points are crossed. Against this background, urgency has become an essential driving force behind, and challenge for, the climate movement. Yet while this urgency is certainly based in physics, it is also a social product. This chapter discusses how the contested nature of time shapes at least three core dimensions of climate activism: strategy, politics and goals. The chapter furthermore argues that discussions of temporality should be attentive to the contextuality of time: what might seem a future threat in privileged parts of the world presents only one of the more recent ecological disasters to disrupt disadvantaged communities worldwide. Discussions of time should therefore inform the development of comparative scholarship on climate activism, and vice versa.

Key words: Climate change, social movements, temporality, states, (de-)politicization, mitigation & adaptation.

Introduction

The climate movement is distinct from most other social movements by the temporality of its main concern: climate change will have irreversible consequences that will become inevitable as soon as certain tipping points are crossed (e.g. Steffen et al. 2018). This temporality is becoming increasingly palpable, as more and more young people today can expect to experience severe climate impacts within their lifetimes. Media (like *the Guardian*) and politicians (like US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez) are recognizing the severity of the situation by favoring terms like 'climate crisis' over 'climate change'. Against this background, urgency has become one of the most salient driving forces behind, and challenges for, the climate movement.

Yet while this urgency is certainly related to the effects of 'basic physics', it is also a social product. Edensor, Head and Kothari (2020) argue that while climate science may deal with linear time, what matters sociologically is temporality or the "social and cultural conceptions and perceptions of time" (p. 255). As social movements are constantly involved in the internal and external negotiation of knowledge and meaning (e.g. Eyerman and Jamison 1991), we should thus see the temporality and implied urgency of climate change as a social construct that can be challenged, and not just as a debate about climate science. Taking up this challenge, this chapter argues that three essential debates shaping today's climate activism can be understood as essentially linked to, and driven by, a socially constructed sense of urgency. Each of these debates, as well as a discussion of temporality more generally, provide key venues for taking comparative research on climate activism forward.

The first debate discussed below concerns temporality in relation to the targets of actions and the role of the state. That is, should climate activists focus on putting pressure on representative governments to solve the crisis, or, given the continued failure of governments to act, has it become time for activists to take matters into their own hands by focusing on do-it-yourself (DIY) activism instead? Two emerging forms of climate activism can be linked to the latter option: direct actions against the fossil fuel industry and grassroots alternatives by which movements get involved in promoting local solutions to the climate crisis. By contrast, recent climate campaigns, such as Fridays For Future (FFF) and Extinction Rebellion (XR) use a potentially even stronger urgency framing as they rally around a 'climate emergency' frame that put the onus back on the state. 'Demand action or do it yourself' is thus a key strategic debate that is to an important extent shaped by temporality.

Secondly, as mainstream approaches to addressing climate change have not delivered required change, debates have intensified about whether the time for incrementalism has run out. Instead, climate activists are increasingly advocating more radical systemic change. At the same time, some question whether radical demands, such as ending the capitalist growth economy, are sufficiently realistic given the amount of time required to realize them. It is argued that the movement should instead focus on what is more readily achievable, possibly buying time for further change in the future. Discussions like these are reflected in common phrases like 'the ecologically necessary is politically impossible' (Wackernagel and Rees 1998) and 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' (e.g. Jamison 1994). Temporality is thus a key dimension in debates about the politicization and depoliticization of climate activism (Kenis and Lievens 2014).

Thirdly, as the window for effective climate action is slowly closing (or has already closed, according to some), and as consequences of climate change are noticeable across the globe, some claim that we are witnessing a shift from apocalyptic to postapocalyptic environmentalism, or the spread of "environmental activism based on a catastrophic loss experienced as already having occurred, as ongoing or as impossible to prevent, rather than as a future risk or threat" (Cassegård and Thörn 2018, 563). For instance, an emerging yet largely unaddressed question is what role climate movements play

in shaping society's adaptation to the consequences of climate change. However, by challenging the temporality of postapocalyptic climate change as excessively pessimistic, many activists have defended a more optimistic outlook to defend an ongoing focus on mitigation.

Through these three urgency-related debates, this chapter uses temporality as a lens to understand key tensions and the significant heterogeneity within today's climate change movement (CCM), thereby contributing to recent developments in the study of time in social movements (Gillan and Edwards 2020). The CCM has been defined as "a loose, but nonetheless highly active umbrella structure which is supported, shaped, and used by a multiplicity of civil society actors who are active in climate politics" (Garrelts & Dietz, 2014, p. 7). Such a broad definition captures the wide range of more or less connected or likeminded groups and individuals working on this topic. Recent work on the notion of 'climatization' describes how, in a context in which climate change has become seen as the mother of all problems, more and more issues and campaigns are being defined in terms of climate change to draw on the momentum and legitimacy this topic currently holds (Aykut, Foyer, and Morena 2017; de Moor 2020a). As a result, the label 'climate movement' in fact comes to cover multiple movements that over time relate differently to each other across ever changing conflict lines (de Moor 2018; Hadden 2015).

While this chapter discusses these conflicts in more detail, this diversity also makes it impossible to cover the entire climate movement in a single chapter. In line with my own research focus, the debates presented here primarily refer to climate activism in the Global North. However, to varying degrees they are relevant in the Global South as well. Arguing that temporalities of climate change are place specific (Edensor, Head, and Kothari 2020; Cassegård and Thörn 2018), the chapter moreover develops the argument that temporality can be a useful tool in developing comparative research on climate activism – especially to build bridges between research on the Global North and South. In the remainder of this chapter, I first provide a brief overview of the (limited) comparative research on climate activism, after which I discuss the three urgency-related debates within climate activism. Throughout this chapter, I point out in what ways comparative research may in the future contribute to our understanding of climate activism, in particular along the lines of these three debates. I conclude by developing a more general argument about the potential of comparative research on temporality in climate activism.

Comparative research on climate activism

Comparative research on environmental movements more generally is abundant (for a recent overview, see de Moor and Wahlström, n.d.). Some of this research may cover activism related to climate issues. However, an inventory using the online publication database Scopus reveals only seven publications explicitly comparing climate activism across various geographical areas or scales.[1]

Bomberg (2012) compares the United States and the European Union in an analysis of how features of multilevel systems affect climate activism. Baer (2012) and Rosewarne et al. (2013) both compare the Australian climate justice movement to that in other places. Wahlström et al. (2013) analyze how the prognostic framing of the climate issue (i.e. whether it was framed in terms of climate justice) differed between three parallel protests around the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit. Cassegård et

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[1] Used search strings were ' "climate activism" AND compar* ', ' "climate movement" AND compar* ', and ' climate AND "political opportunity structure". In addition, the journal *Global Environmental Politics* was browsed for occurrences of both "climate movement" and "climate activism". Only comparisons between geographical units or scales were included.

al. (2017) look at the way in which the climate movement in the US, Japan, Sweden and Denmark is shaped by a back-and-forth between their national context, and their engagement in the transnational UN climate process. Similarly, Derman (2014) and Henry et al. (2019) found that climate NGOs from countries with more restrictive political opportunity structures are more likely to target international governmental organizations.

A recent survey project on the global climate strikes by Fridays For Future compares the individual characteristics, mobilization and attitudes of protesters across 25 cities in several European countries, the US, Mexico and Australia (Wahlström et al. 2019; de Moor, Uba, et al. 2020). Descriptive analyses of these data show patterns of difference and similarity across these cities. For instance, while the distribution of gender and age composition differ considerably between the demonstrations, a focus on the state combined with a skepticism towards governments appears to be a universal feature.

Given this limited research, the remainder of this chapter is necessarily based on research that is predominantly not explicitly comparative. Therefore, for each of the three debates discussed below, I suggest venues to expand comparative research on climate activism.

Time to do it yourself?

According to a leading figure in the Transition Towns movement (one of the most influential grassroots climate actors around 2010), "If we wait for governments, it'll be too late; if we act as individuals, it'll be too little; but if we act as communities, maybe it'll be enough" (quoted in Kenis 2016). This quote expresses a clear lack of confidence in the ability of states – alone or in international organizations – to address society's main environmental challenges within the time frame dictated by those problems. In response, it promotes what Ulrich Beck (1997) has called 'subpolitics'. Ecological crises arguably prove the state can no longer be seen as the ultimate driver of social change. Instead, all areas of society are affected by and can affect ecological crises, thereby making them 'subpolitical' domains. Action forms like consumer boycotts or lifestyle politics therefore become appealing ways to take matters into one's own hands (Stolle and Micheletti 2013; de Moor 2017).

By contrast, some of the earliest climate campaigns were strongly focused on trying to influence government decisions. A Friends of the Earth campaign in the US between 1979 and 1989 has been considered one of the earliest ones to address climate change, and was squarely focused on trying to get the US government on board to address the issue (Rich 2018). Later, the emergence of a broader, self-identifying climate movement took place around the establishment of the UN's annual climate summits, or COPs (Conference of Parties) (Hadden 2015). Most notably, the Climate Action Network was founded to internationally coordinate the efforts of NGOs trying to influence global climate summits and for a long time remained the primary network within the climate movement, focusing on putting pressure on official COP negotiations through insider lobbying and outsider demonstrations (Newell 2006). In 2007 it became challenged by advocates of climate justice who formed the alternative network Climate Justice Now!, introducing both more radical analyses and forms of action to the climate movement (Hadden 2015; Fisher 2010).

At the national level, notable campaigns also focused strongly on influencing governments. For instance, the 'Big Ask' campaign organized by Friends of the Earth has been seen as instrumental to achieving the UK Climate Change Act – one of the most ambitious climate legislations of its time, which was later replicated in other countries, including Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Sweden (Carter and Childs 2018). A growing list of litigations against the inaction of governments in the face

of climate change – such as the Dutch Urgenda campaign – represents another clearly state-oriented tactic in the climate movement (Setzer and Vanhala 2019).

While there had long been distrust towards the state, especially in radical climate movement circles, the failed 2009 COP15 Summit in Copenhagen proved a watershed moment for much larger parts of the climate movement to become disenchanted with government-oriented action forms, and in particular with attempts to influence international summits. What, after all, can be won by putting pressure on governments to act if those governments are considered fundamentally unable to deliver, even if they would want to? Ever since, the appropriate distance between the movement and the state has remained under debate, culminating in a new split within the movement's mobilization around COP21 (de Moor 2018). At the 2015 Paris Climate Summit, some groups continued to lobby the official negotiations, but a large part of the assembled climate movement coalition mobilized with the intention to ignore the COP itself, instead targeting polluting corporations and promoting 'real' over 'false' solutions. As one interviewee explained to me at the time:

> "[The goal for COP21 is] to build momentum so that after, you actually have a climate movement that we can go back to fighting battles on the ground, that the UK can go back to fighting fracking, and in other places. . . the Germans can go back to stopping coal. And people go back feeling that we actually do have a movement and it's not all focused on the UN. It's focused on what we are doing now. I mean, COP21 has to be about after COP21. That is the big lesson from Copenhagen: not focusing on the fucking talks themselves. (Interview, CJA, 2015)."

The perceived reasons for states' inability to address climate change vary, but a common narrative is that corporate influence – especially from the fossil fuel industry – has been able to prevent action. For some activists this has even been a reason to reject the analysis that the state was 'unable' to act, arguing that this was precisely how they mask their unwillingness to listen to the people instead of the companies. Nonetheless, it is clear that some of the most remarkable climate campaigns and victories in the aftermath of COP21 can be seen as the climate movement taking matters into its own hands (de Moor 2020a). The anti-fracking campaign in the UK continued direct action campaigns at (planned) fracking sites across the country, ultimately contributing to a nation-wide ban on fracking.[2] In Germany, the *Ende Gelände* campaign mobilized previously unseen numbers in direct actions against coal mines in the country (Sander 2017). In France, the ZAD (Zone Action a Défendre) movement succeeded in stopping the realization of a new airport in Notre Dame de Landes near the city of Nantes,[3] and in the US, various direct action campaigns managed to – at least temporarily – stop the construction of oil pipelines crossing native Americans' territories and sacred grounds (Estes and Dhillon 2019).

In short, refusing to waste increasingly scarce time by waiting for government action, many of the most emblematic and effective climate campaigns in the Global North across the 2010s became about taking matters into the movement's own hands by directly stopping fossil fuel industries. This spread of what Naomi Klein (2013) has called 'Blockadia' needs to be seen at least in part as the diffusion of tactics from the Global South, where direct action and civil disobedience campaigns had already been key methods of the environmental justice movement for a long time (Martinez-Alier et al. 2016).

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[2] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/02/fracking-banned-in-uk-as-government-makes-major-u-turn
[3] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/17/france-abandons-plan-for-580m-airport-in-west-of-country

Meanwhile, sustainable consumption and lifestyle politics continued to flourish as more and more individuals wanted to take responsibility in their everyday lives (de Moor and Balsiger 2019; Thörn and Svenberg 2016; for critiques of this development see e.g. Maniates 2001). Individuals were found to increasingly focus on sustainable consumption and lifestyle politics (Stolle and Micheletti 2013) – especially those most skeptical about the state's ability to address environmental challenges (de Moor, Marien, and Hooghe 2017). Collectives increasingly developed grassroots alternatives as direct responses to climate change and other ecological crises, being more or less explicitly framed as a rejection to wait any longer for the state's willingness or ability to respond to demands.

However, if a sense of urgency, of not wanting to wait for governments to act, fueled this wave of DIY climate activism, the same sense of urgency has more recently begun to fuel campaigns that put the onus back on the state. In the fall of 2018, two new campaigns emerged – Fridays For Future (FFF) and Extinction Rebellion (XR) – that more than anything else demanded stronger state action on climate change and did so on the basis of an unusually strong message of urgency (de Moor, De Vydt, et al. 2020). Around the time of their emergence, the IPCC (2018) released a report spelling out in stark terms that the world had 12 years left to take radical climate action in order to have a reasonable chance of keeping global warming below 1.5 degrees, or risk a henceforth-uncontrollable escalation of climatic change. It was this 12-year window of opportunity that became central to the framing of both groups who centrally focused on demanding government action on climate change. This return to the state has been framed – especially by XR – as a direct critique of the inefficiency of previous climate campaigns, as well as of the more general tendency to put the responsibility for solving climate change on individual citizens and consumers.

Implications for future research

While some degree of skepticism toward the state's ability to solve climate change seems to have become near universal, comparative research is still useful to understand the manifestation of the above discussion across countries. The political opportunity structure (POS) approach has long shown that taking into account cross-national and cross-scalar variations regarding the favorability of political contexts for social movements has important consequences for social movement strategies (van der Heijden 2006). However, few studies have applied this framework to explain the prevalence of state- and non-state oriented action forms (however see de Moor 2016; de Moor and Wahlström 2019). Rather, the focus of research tends to be on explaining the prevalence of more or less radical action forms (e.g. Kriesi et al. 1995).

Therefore, some important caveats remain. Firstly, more research is needed to understand how the POS shapes not just *how* movements target the state, but also *whether* they do so, and under what conditions they are more inclined to rely on DIY-tactics. Secondly, comparative research on POS has mainly focused on states' openness to movements' demands (i.e. their input structures), whereas the discussion above makes it clear that the states' ability to get things done might be equally important. Finally, the above discussion has mainly been developed in reference to climate activism in Western democracies. Linking it more explicitly to debates about climate activism outside this context presents further opportunities for future research. For instance, Martinez-Alier et al. (2016) show the prevalence of direct action in environmental justice campaigns in the Global South – often in non-democratic settings. How do discussions of urgency and political opportunities shape these action forms, in particular given the distinctive temporality of climate change in places where "the socio-environmental Armageddon is already here" (Swyngedouw 2013, 15)?

Time to transform?

The chapter has so far discussed the kinds of tactics and targets that are motivated by the urgent need to address climate change. It here shifts attention to what this action should arguably demand or achieve. That is, what kind of change is believed to be needed to ultimately address climate change (and/or underlying problems), and what kind of change can arguably be seen as realistic to achieve within the given time window? Does the 'climate emergency' call for radical change now, or is there no time to lose on fanciful ideological debates, instead requiring a need for pragmatic reforms?

Debates between radicals and reformists have long shaped environmentalism (Doherty 2002). Radicals tend to argue that environmental crises are merely symptoms of the more fundamental problems with the capitalist growth economy and modernism's anthropocentric worldview, leading them to support ideas like economic degrowth and the promotion of an eco-centric worldview. Similarly, some indigenous perspectives conceive of climate change as related to colonialism (Whyte 2017). On the other hand, reformists are more inclined to support principles of ecological modernization and sustainable development by which the ecological impacts on capitalist production and consumption can arguably be managed through technological innovation and economic incentives. Along similar lines, environmentalism has been defined as being political or post-political, with the latter defining it in terms of a single global, scientific problem requiring a techno-managerial solution, and the former emphasizing its characterization as a political conflict with winners and losers, competing interests, and ideological struggle (Kenis and Lievens 2014; Chatterton, Featherstone, and Routledge 2013; Swyngedouw 2009).

These positions can be understood, at least in part, through questions of time and urgency that are historically specific. On the one hand, the position and meaning of both positions has changed over time. On the other hand, the defense of these positions is related to the temporality of climate change. The radical position was more dominant in the countercultural ecological movement that emerged in the 1970s, while reformist ideas came to dominate environmental discourses during two 'post-political' decades after the fall of the Soviet-Union, during which liberal capitalism presented itself as a hegemonic political force (Blühdorn 2014). The emergence of climate justice as an idea in the years running up to Copenhagen had already politicized the climate movement by arguing that addressing climate change necessarily involves competing interests and social conflict, as opposed to the universalizing perspective of 'humanity vs carbon' (Kenis and Lievens 2014). Furthermore, the failure of the much anticipated Copenhagen Climate Summit (COP15) convinced an ever growing part of the climate movement that liberal and market-oriented reforms might not deliver the radical systemic change needed to avert catastrophic climate change (Chatterton, Featherstone, and Routledge 2013). Hence, according to various authors we see a gradual dismissal of reformist ideas like sustainable development, and a return to more radical ecologist ideas (Lövbrand 2019; e.g. Blühdorn 2017). The urgent need for far-reaching social change spelled out in the 2018 IPCC report on pathways to staying within 1.5 degrees warming has arguable furthered the popularity of transformational rather than reformist environmentalism.

While environmentalism has thus long been marked by an internal struggle over radical and reformist approaches, the most recent history of climate activism suggests an urgency-induced return to embracing the need for more radical social change. Nonetheless, even in radical circles, the difficulty of imagining the realization of radical change within climate scientists' specified time windows continues to inspire support for less radical ideas that can presumably be incorporated more readily into the existing system. Schlembach et al. noted in their research on British Camps for Climate Action (CCA) that:

> One of the reasons why these [post-political] arguments had such traction within an outwardly anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian space stems from the unique qualities of climate change

as a social movement 'issue' and a matter of 'urgency'. (...) Many CCA activists argued that, with the likelihood of climatic 'tipping points' being reached within less than 10 years, there may not be time for the type of radical politics that the Camp officially endorsed, and the perceived long and slow process of dismantling capitalism and replacing it with a more equitable system. (2012, 815)

Others have interpreted the CCA along the lines of similar debates on urgency. While McGregor (2015) argued that within the CCA, 'urgency' is also operated to defend radical direct action tactics, Saunders (2012) described how it was used as an argument to divert from the Camp's radical origins. Quoting one activist, Saunders described how "the camp was being used more as a government lobby tool. The urgency of the situation was making people turn toward the state for solutions" (2012, 840).

Since these studies of the CCA, research into this topic seems to have withered, and is arguably in need of revision. In more recent examples, such as that of XR and FFF, we see for instance that temporalities of urgency, such as the groups' demands that governments declare a 'climate emergency', inspire both radical tactics and demands to go "beyond politics". While XR defines politics mainly in terms of party politics, they also call to act on science rather than politics, which "was – and still is – our vision (...): citizens learning the truth from experts and combining it with their own lived experience".[4] FFF represents in particular the view that older generations have betrayed younger ones because only the younger generations will live to experience most catastrophic climate impacts. Thus, based on their typical age profile, FFF activists likely experience a distinctly urgent climate temporality. Again we see that based on their framed urgency of climate change, they demand that politicians "unite behind the science" while refraining from making explicit political demands.

In short, the temporality of climate change feeds into wider debates about the appropriateness of radical and reformist approaches. While some argue that our only chance is radical change now, others find this approach unrealistic and prefer to address climate change through reforms, or at least buy time in doing so. At this point, it is useful to briefly introduce a debate that closely relates to temporality and (de-)politicization. That is, the very production of the 'correct' understanding of climate change and its time horizon is itself embedded in the politics of knowledge production (Turnhout et al. 2020; e.g. Goldman, Turner, and Daly 2018). Who has the power to define what is 'true' about climate change, and whose knowledge is excluded, directly ties in with whose temporality of climate change – and by extension, whose response – is preferred. For instance, while official narratives have long portrayed climate change as a future threat to be managed by ramping up techno-managerial interventions, many indigenous communities have already experienced severe ecological and societal breakdown, and climate change for them is but a more recent addition to this pattern (Swyngedouw 2013; Whyte 2017). To address the problem framed in this way puts climate change on a very different timescale and would require much more radical change than the gradual increase of the economy's carbon efficiency. However, such understandings of climate change are typically outweighed by official 'climate science'.

Implications for comparative research

Debates about urgency force activists to reflect on what is ecologically necessary and politically possible. Yet what is politically possible is time and context dependent. Democracies are clearly distinct from one another in the extent to which they give access to radical challenges, and this has implications for political activism (Vráblíková 2016). Moreover, what is radical in ecological terms might depend on the progress already made within a country in terms of public opinion and

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[4] https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2020/04/18/to-go-beyond-politics-we-must-trust-the-people/

environmental policies, with countries displaying a more developed environmental track-record being more open to far-reaching demands (Fiorino 2011). In other words, the political opportunity structure for radical demands differs between countries, and future research may therefore benefit from exploring which conditions make ambitious climate action seem more viable.

Time to adapt?

As debates about effective strategies continue, some within the climate movement have begun to question whether it is not too late to avoid catastrophic scenarios like a Hothouse Earth and thus whether it is not too late to campaign for avoiding them. As hope and a sense of efficacy present valuable assets for climate activism (Williams and Jaftha 2020), some may therefore have become disillusioned to the point of abandoning the movement altogether. Others, however, have developed what Cassegård and Thörn (2018) have recently called 'postapocalyptic environmentalism'; a type of environmental activism that starts from the assumption that environmental catastrophe is already unavoidable or here, but which nonetheless continues to look for meaningful responses. While research on this topic is still limited, it touches upon an urgency-related topic that goes to the heart of temporality in today's climate activism.

Cassegård and Thörn themselves illustrate their concept using two examples of 'cultural activism'. First, the Dark Mountain project was founded by disillusioned environmentalists Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine in 2009. Based on an acceptance that the environmental movement 'will not save the planet', they proposed a cultural project to reinvent what is meaningful and valuable once the end of our civilization is accepted. Ever since the publication of their manifesto *Uncivilization*, many writers and artists have joined the project with works that explore societal collapse and what might come after. Second, the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature (ITRN) are mock tribunals organized by activists to try environmental crimes, in particular against indigenous people. Again, the aim is not to redress environmental degradation, but to cope with catastrophes through the enactment of justice. What both examples show according to the authors is that:

> "the acceptance of loss can be a wellspring of new forms of activism and new forms of struggles, including attempts to salvage what can still be saved and demanding redress and settling wrongs. By accepting loss, energies can be freed for new battles that are felt to be more meaningful and winnable than those that are lost." (2018, p. 14).

Furthermore, the authors argue that "Accepting loss as a fact may free the imagination to find new ways of *adapting* to the world." (2018, p. 14-15, italics added). As such, postapocalyptic environmentalism may also go beyond 'cultural activism' to include more practical forms of activism. For instance, if the catastrophe is already here and can thus no longer be prevented, the traditional focus on mitigation that has long dominated within the climate movement may give room for a shift in focus to climate adaptation. This shift has most vocally been promoted by Jem Bendell in his influential work on 'deep adaptation' (Bendell 2018), which considers 'societal collapse' as unavoidable, and therefore asks what it might mean for climate action to focus on how to deal with that collapse and what comes after it. Specifically, it does so around "three Rs": "Resilience: What is it that we most value and how can we keep that? Relinquishment: What is it that we can give up in order to not make matters worse? Restoration: What can we bring back that has been lost?" (Bendell 2018). Particularly within XR – which included a chapter by Bendell in its handbook – these ideas have become influential, even though most of what XR does can be categorized as focused on mitigation.

Despite the apparent significance of these developments, the role of adaptation within the climate movement has only been examined to a very limited degree. In a research project that is ongoing at

the time of writing, I have begun to address this gap in the literature. Firstly, in the previously mentioned global survey of participants in the Fridays For Futures Global Climate Strike of September 2019 (de Moor, Uba, et al. 2020), we asked participants whether they thought government action on climate change should focus on mitigation, adaptation or both equally. We found a similar pattern whereby about half the respondents prioritized mitigation while the other half attributed equal weight to both. This suggests that adaptation is emerging on the radar of a substantial part of the climate movement.

This willingness among many rank and file activists to accept adaptation as a movement goal seems to be contrasted by the attitude of many organizers within the movement. In a critique of Bendell's article, activist scholars Nicholas, Hall and Schmidt (2020) claimed that his skepticism was based on a on a flawed interpretation of climate science and therefore unwarranted. More importantly, they argue that his text was at risk of undermining the efforts of the climate movement by spreading a sense of hopelessness that would paralyze (potential) activists. In response, Bendell defended most of the scientific claims, and presented his own evidence to argue that the Deep Adaptation discourse was in fact deeply motivating to its participants.

While the debate may have been especially fierce within XR, the case is certainly not unique. For instance, Simonet and Fatoric (2016) found that especially environmental movement leaders had a negative attitude towards a focus on adaptation, because they saw it as fatalistic and as an excuse not to act on climate change, because it assumes that consequences can be dealt with later. My own qualitative interviews with climate movement organizers in five European cities (Malmö, Hamburg, Antwerp, Bristol and Manchester) revealed that some indeed shared this skepticism towards adaptation – even if they considered the odds of successfully mitigating climate change to be low (de Moor 2020b). Specifically, they argued that as long as there is still a chance – however small – to keep global warming within safe limits, all energy should be dedicated to that. Adaptation could always happen when despite their efforts it would eventually become necessary, or was seen as altogether fanciful given the enormity of the impact of unmitigated climate change. However, many others were much more willing to consider taking adaptation on board as a goal – especially those more experienced activists who had already gone through several cycles of unsuccessful climate mitigation campaigns. For instance, their organizing principles more strongly aimed to build social resilience in the face of climate change, or they focused on resilience-increasing projects, such as local food projects that would insulate society from the collapse of global supply chains.

Despite these ambitions, they often continued to prioritize mitigation over adaptation, and sometimes even refrained from acting on adaptation altogether out of a sense that it would be difficult to combine with mitigation work. Hence, despite the presumed spread of postapocalyptic environmentalism, the movement for now seems largely unwilling to let go of its traditional mitigation goals. It is clear, however, that competing temporalities (is it too late to mitigate?) are creating deep disagreements within climate movements.

Implications for comparative research

Notwithstanding important nuances, my research showed continuity in attitudes to adaptation across several European countries. This, however, is likely related to the continent's relatively limited exposure to the consequences of climate change so far (European Environmental Agency 2017). Case studies from outside Europe show much more developed activism on adaptation. Across the Global South, in places where the impacts of climate change are already more present, many justice issues emerge in relation to adaptation to those impacts, which occasionally become the subject of contentious episodes. In general, vulnerable populations are more likely to be exposed to the costs of

adaptation, and less likely to benefit from them or influence related decision making processes (e.g. Anguelovski et al. 2016). Case studies show that such injustices occasionally become the subject of mobilizations, such as in India (Chu 2018). Likewise, in the US, where extreme weather events have become more common as a result of climate change, adaption has become a more contentious issue than in Europe. For instance, Dawson (2019) describes the case of Occupy Sandy, a movement promoting greater social justice in the city's response to Hurricane Sandy and future storms. Méndez (2020) describes how local environmental justice activists in Oakland made adaptation of vulnerable neighborhoods a central point of their campaign to influence the city's climate plan. Still, both cases concern actors outside the traditional environmental groups that make up the most visible part of the climate movement, which continues to focus on mitigation. This may be because adaptation raises issues that have typically been outside the scope of climate activism. For instance, discussions of climate justice have long been focused on how mitigation should address global injustices (Bulkeley, Edwards, and Fuller 2014). By contrast, adaptation will likely raise local social justice issues that could put climate activists on unfamiliar political terrain. Hence, the focus of the climate movement could consequently change substantially.

Finally, a shift towards adaptation could lead to a further re-centering of the state. That is, while some discuss the role of civil society as 'co-creator' of adaptation (Mees, Crabbé, and Driessen 2017), justice oriented critiques have demanded states take up their responsibility to protect in particular the most vulnerable communities. Hence, discussions of the 'return of the state' and of climate adaptation will likely benefit from a connected approach.

Conclusion

Climate change is inextricably linked to urgency, and the overview presented in this chapter shows that temporality shapes climate activism in at least three key ways. Firstly, it shapes the debate about whether the movement should stop waiting for governments to act, instead taking matters into its own hands through DIY tactics, or instead, whether it is time to stop focusing on small-scale, incremental, everyday and DIY action forms to focus instead on large-scale systemic change that will necessarily involve national governments and international organizations. This relates to the second debate. Namely, does the urgency and scale of the climate crisis mean that we need radical change now more than ever, or does it precisely mean that we do not have time to wait for major changes like 'the end of capitalism' and that we should focus on more modest changes that can be achieved here and now? Put differently, should climate action be sped up by depoliticizing it, thereby making it more palatable within the system's current configuration, or should it focus on (re-)politicizing it, as radical change *now* is the only realistic option? Finally, while climate activism has traditionally focused predominantly on mitigation, uncertainty about whether there is still a (meaningful) window of opportunity for averting dangerous climate change has inspired a debate about whether or not it is time to shift focus to dealing with – rather than preventing – the consequences of climate change. In short, the unique temporality of climate change fundamentally shapes debates about the goals and strategies of the movement.

Each of these debates are ongoing, and especially the latter of the three remains understudied, thus providing opportunities for further research. In particular, comparative research on climate activism has remained surprisingly scarce, thus limiting our understanding of the contextual dependency of these debates. Throughout this chapter, I have pointed to various possible directions for such research. This research can clearly draw on the wider comparative scholarship on environmental and social movements (de Moor and Wahlström, n.d.). In this conclusion, I finally present some more general reflections on temporality and comparative perspectives on social movements that may guide this research further.

Firstly, the emerging study of temporality in social movements provides promising venues to expand our understanding of the dynamics discussed in this chapter – and vice versa (Gillan and Edwards 2020). For instance, Gillan's (2020) recent work on temporality in social movements suggests that we should understand social movements in relation to large scale socio-political and historical tendencies ('vectors') that combine into 'timescapes' that both shape and are shaped by movements. Gillan primarily aims to challenge the literature's tendency to interpret various social movements as short-lived and discontinuous. He illustrates his theory by arguing that the Global Justice Movement, the Anti (Iraq) War Movement and the Occupy movement should all be understood in relation to each other and to the "neoliberal timescape", though each in their own historically unique way. This chapter's focus on climate activism adds that vectors become relevant as a result of debates within movements. While climate change 'itself' is certainly one vector, its unfolding in terms of severity and reversibility is contested. Moreover, depending on the diagnostic and prognostic framing of climate change (i.e. what is the nature of the problem, and what should be done about it (Wahlström, Wennerhag, and Rootes 2013)) different vectors become relevant, producing distinct timescapes and timescales. While for mainstream, reformist approaches the progress of science and technological 'solutions' may present the central vector, for more radical approaches the longer history and future of capitalism are key.

Indigenous perspectives introduce different vectors and timescapes altogether, as they challenge the exceptionality of climate change by interpreting it along the lines of a much longer history of colonialism. As Whyte notes, "Indigenous peoples often understand their vulnerability to climate change as an intensification of colonially-induced environmental changes" (2017, 154). More recently, Whyte (2020) has argued that from the point of view of indigenous peoples, it is already too late to achieve climate justice, because necessary improvements to the relationships between indigenous peoples and powerful actors like national governments would take too long to develop: "A relational tipping point, in a certain respect, has already been crossed, before the ecological tipping point" (Whyte 2020, 1). Such competing interpretations thus introduce different temporalities, which shape definitions of urgency, and by extension, goals and strategies.

A comparative perspective further alerts us to the fact that such temporalities must be place specific. According to Cassegård and Thörn:

> "time and space are (...) inseparable; his [(Bakhtin 1981)] concept of the chronotope (time–space) implies that a particular conception of time always has spatial dimension and vice versa. Using the concept of the chronotope in the analysis of social movement narratives implies discerning how the collective that acts and moves, be it the nation, the tribe, or Humanity, always implies a particular ordering of time and space."

Thus, what comparative research can add to the discussion of temporalities is how they interact with local conditions, be that in terms of (predicted) impacts of climate change, colonial histories, political opportunities, economic conditions, or civic cultures. More specifically, the concept of the chronotope may help us understand how definitions of what is ecologically disastrous/necessary and politically acceptable/impossible (Wackernagel and Rees 1998) are embedded in social constructions of place, temporality and scale. While to some climate change may be a recent scientific challenge to which there are clear technological solutions and for which the political legitimacy of climate action implies a favorable political opportunity structure, to others it represents an acceleration of centuries of oppression, the solution to which implies both a long-term uphill political struggle against colonialism and a reliance on traditional ways of adapting to environmental challenges (Whyte 2017). In short, given the importance of temporality and place to climate change, future research on chronotopes is likely to add considerably to our comparative understanding of climate activism. In particular, it may

contribute to the much-needed strengthening of the connection between research on climate activism in the Global South and North, which, as this chapter attests, have remained too far apart.

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