

L'EXPRESS

THE SNOWS OF MOUNT KILIMANJARO By Claude Allegre

The cause of climate change remains unknown. So, let us be cautious.

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During the same fortnight, we have seen Yann Arthus-Bertrand's stunning photographs showing the vanishing ice cap of Mount Kilimanjaro, and we have immediately heard the same old story about global warming and read in Science magazine an important paper co-authored by several distinguished glaciologists which showed that glacier mass balance in Antarctica has not changed during the past thirty years[1]. There is a general consensus among specialists on one point: if widespread global warming occurs, it will be experienced more intensely near the poles than at the equator. Yet, these authors explain that we can observe a massive retreat of glacial ice in some places on the Antarctic continent while there is also a thickening of ice sheets in other places.

So, the question that arises is whether there is climate warming or not? The argument that builds upon the retreating white cap of Kilimanjaro seems implacable. The retreating white cap is observable, tangible. Indeed, but things are not as straightforward as they seem. The gradual retreat of the snows of Kilimanjaro is often imputed to local phenomena, the main one of these being desertification in East Africa. In a recent issue of Science magazine, French researchers have shown that this desertification was in a large measure due to tectonic activities responsible for the gradual uplift of the African continent, thereby inducing a reorganization of atmospheric circulation. Greenhouse effect plays no significant role in these processes.

Following the month of August experienced by the northern half of France, the prophets of doom of global warming will have a lot on their plate in order to make our fellow countrymen swallow their certitudes. In all likelihood, there is a climate change, but the latter is characterized more by sudden shifts, both in space and time (the heat wave or the "rotten summer", just like the violent tornadoes or the increased frequency of floods, are examples of these) than by global warming. The cause of this climate change is unknown. Is it man? Is it nature?

Glaciers' chronicles or historical archives point to the fact that climate is a capricious phenomena. This fact is confirmed by mathematical meteorological theories. So, let us be cautious. But the exposure of man's responsibility as regards global warming allows us to sit idly by (the effect of the measures advocated will be felt only in half a century!). On the other hand, the crusade against extreme theories can be led with tangible results! However, as this is not fashionable, we choose to remain passive. In the meanwhile, the ecology of helpless protesting has become a very lucrative business for some people!