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Manufacturing Consent: Rereading News on Four Climate Summits (2000-2012)

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Abstract

This paper examines if and how news media contribute to manufacturing consent by disabling ideological disagreement about established social structures underlying climate disruption. A Critical Discourse Analysis reveals three discursive constructions emerging in two Belgian elite newspapers and one alternative news site during four climate summits (2000-2012). Despite advocating different policy approaches based on opposing ideological preferences, the newspapers were found to manufacture consent about these preferences by relying on depoliticizing discursive strategies. Only during COP18, ideological disagreement about alternative policy frameworks was enabled in the alternative news site and opinionated sections of one newspaper, by relying on politicizing strategies.

Keywords

climate change, news media, depoliticization, critical discourse analysis

Introduction

It has become conventional wisdom to argue that the urgency of climate change compels us to overcome ideological divisions about how to act on the knowledge that the world is warming due to human activities (e.g. Giddens, 2011: 74). At the same time, an evident way of articulating and addressing the problem of climate change, one that succeeds in reconciling conflicting values and interests and in achieving consensus on political action, is still missing (e.g. Hulme, 2009, 2013). Climate change confronts societies with many profound challenges about which a broad democratic debate is urgent (e.g. energy, transportation, agriculture). However, an increasing number of authors criticize the predominant discourses about climate governance for disabling exactly such a debate (e.g. Berglez & Olausson, 2014; Goeminne, 2010; Kenis & Lievens, 2015; Machin, 2013; Pepermans & Maesele, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2010;). These authors start from the observation that the rise of climate change on the political agenda has coincided with the decrease of ideological disagreement about (alternatives to) the social structures underlying

the problem of global climate disruption. Most importantly, this “depoliticization” of mainstream climate change discourses is criticized for discouraging the articulation and shaping of alternative sustainable futures beyond the perimeters of the existent status quo.

Remarkably, the role of news media in the depoliticization of climate change remains unresearched. This is the case despite earlier influential claims that mainstream, commercial news reporting serves an important role in manufacturing public consent about established social structures and power relations (e.g. Herman & Chomsky, 1988). The aim of this paper is to address this gap by examining whether, and in what ways, news media contribute to manufacturing consent by disabling ideological disagreement about these social structures and their relationship to global climate change. To this end, we report on the results of a Critical Discourse Analysis in which we examine how two Belgian elite newspapers and one alternative news website discursively (re-)define climate change in their coverage of four United Nations climate summits between 2000 and 2012 (N= 377). Particular attention is paid to how different discursive constructions are characterized by discursive strategies which either close (i.e. depoliticize) or open (i.e. politicize) the debate on underlying ideological disagreements.

In the first section of this paper, we discuss the existing literature on the depoliticization of climate change. The second section explores in more detail the methodology employed, before the subsequent section presents the results of the Critical Discourse Analysis. In this section, we discuss three discursive constructions that advocate a different approach to climate policy, as they emerge from our COP by COP analysis. We conclude by discussing whether and in what ways these discursive constructions manufacture consent about climate governance, by either disabling or enabling ideological disagreement about alternative policy frameworks (and their relationship to established social structures).

The (de-)politicization of climate change

The concept of depoliticization has its origins in post-foundational political philosophy. The latter’s starting point is that each social order is based on particular ideological foundations, which are never absolute, but always contingent and historical, for they are the provisional product and expression of particular social structures and power relations (Marchart, 2007; Mouffe, 2005; Wingenbach, 2011). The democratic nature of a particular social order depends on whether these ideological foundations are recognized and made visible, so they are open to democratic discussion and contestation. Depoliticization refers to any communication practice that misrecognizes or conceals the ideological values, perspectives and choices at work in, for instance, a given policy decision or framework, thereby shielding the latter from contestation, and closing democratic discussion. Mouffe (2005) has shown how this misrecognition or concealment generally takes place by redefining the political struggle in rationalist or moralist terms, turning it into a matter of “right versus wrong”, “rational versus irrational” or “good versus evil”.

For instance, the depoliticization of climate change might refer to how a particular approach to climate governance is (re)presented as the only rational or moral way to define or deal with the problem, while the values, interests, and assumptions informing this representation remain concealed, and dissent is delegitimized as “immoral” or “irrational”. Most often, the characterization of depoliticization is used to criticize technocratic or consensual discourses that reduce action on climate change to market-driven technological innovation or green consumerism, without addressing the root causes of climate disruption (Goeminne, 2010; Kenis & Lievens, 2015, 2017; Swyngedouw, 2010). For example, a frame of scientific consensus about the anthropogenic origin of climate change (e.g. “97% of the scientists agree”) is often put forward as an exclusive basis for policy makers to draw unequivocal conclusions (Pearce et al., 2017; Russill, forthcoming). This instrumentalization of “science”ⁱ, or this scientization of climate change, is criticized for being counterproductive in effectively communicating scientific knowledge, defusing controversies, engaging publics or influencing policy-makers (Pearce et al., 2017). Others have taken aim against other strategies of depoliticization, such as economization (e.g. the justification of technical, market-based policy responses by a logic of economic calculus) or moralization (e.g. turning emission reductions into an ethical, individual responsibility). These have been criticized for constraining citizen political engagement by discouraging the articulation and shaping of sustainable futures beyond the framework of free-market capitalism and neoliberal globalizationⁱⁱ, thereby failing to tackle climate change in effective and socially just ways (Carvalho 2010; Kenis & Lievens, 2015, 2017; Maesele, 2015).

Alternatively, a politicized perspectiveⁱⁱⁱ on climate change rejects the possibility and desirability of a universal consensus about one problem definition or solution (e.g. Kenis & Lievens, 2015; Machin, 2013; Pepermans & Maesele, 2016). It puts forward ideological disagreements about different policy choices as an essential and even positive aspect of effective and democratic policy-making. Coming back to the example of scientization, a politicized perspective implies shifting the terms of the debate from a focus on scientists’ assessments of the physical causes and consequences of climate change to a focus on the societal root causes, the various strategies for change and the existing different visions and alternatives at stake (Kenis & Lievens, 2015).

Despite an increasing interest in the field of media and communication studies for climate change, the issue of depoliticization has not been addressed directly. The role of ideology, on the other hand, has received quite some attention. However, ideology has generally been conceptualized as an independent variable distorting (an otherwise objective view on) the reality of climate change (e.g. Antilla, 2010; Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004; Painter & Ashe, 2012). In that case, politicization is understood as an obstacle to what is expected from media, i.e. an accurate reflection of the established consensus within climate science. Other studies have taken ideology more seriously as an analytical concept and have demonstrated its implications for the production (e.g. Berglez, Höijer &

Olausson, 2009), representation (e.g. Carvalho, 2007) and reception of climate news (e.g. Olausson, 2011). These studies refrain from defining ideology as a form of bias or distortion of reality, but define it instead as the framework(s) people use for making sense of the world, social identity and social relations (see also Maesele & Pepermans, 2017). Nonetheless, a decade ago already, Carvalho (2007: 225) lamented how “the role of ideology in media representations of science is still blatantly under-researched”. Today, her work still stands out in the field for how it succeeded in integrating the concept of ideology in research on media discourse. Her 2007 paper on the representation of climate change in British elite newspapers between 1985 and 2001 showed how ideology “works as a powerful selection device in deciding what is scientific news, i.e. what the relevant ‘facts’ are, [...] who are the authorized ‘agents of definition’ (Carvalho 2007: 223)” and which political conclusions to draw from scientific claims. Her longitudinal design eventually revealed how a newspaper’s view of the social and economic status quo, and its desire to either consolidate or challenge it, tops its hierarchy of values (rather than scientific authority or the allegiance to a particular party in government). This paper builds further on her work in three ways. First, it extends her framework by preserving what is central (examining how ideological preferences are entangled with journalistic reproductions of scientific claims) and complementing it with another analytical layer (examining how discursive strategies of (de-)politicization disable or enable ideological disagreement). Second, it includes a non-commercial, alternative news site in the research design, allowing us to better understand the precise role of commercial news reporting in processes of depoliticization (see also Gunster, 2012). Third, it starts where her analysis ended (2000-2001).

Methodological framework

In contrast to quantitative forms of content analysis, the methodological framework of discourse analysis allows “for examining and drawing attention to climate change as a social and politically embedded phenomenon, closely intertwined with the ideological assumptions underlying our collective sense making processes” (Koteyko & Atanasova, 2016: 3). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in particular, has been used to identify discourses on climate change (e.g. Burke et al., 2015), examine the framing power and representation of social actors in societal debate (e.g. Carvalho & Burgess, 2005) and reveal how language conceals or highlights interests and power relationships through visual, stylistic and linguistic choices (e.g. Carvalho, 2007; Olausson, 2009). Although CDA pays more attention to language use in texts than Foucauldian discourse analysis or discourse theory, it goes beyond a strict linguistic analysis (Koteyko & Atanasova, 2016). Indeed, the “critical” stands for the emphasis in CDA on the social, economic, and cultural contexts in which discourses operate and how particular discourses help to reproduce or challenge power relations within those contexts (Olausson, 2009). More particularly, its “empirical focus on specific instances of language use” allows to “investigate both the

reproduction of discourses whereby no new elements are introduced *and* discursive change through new combinations of discourse” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 7; emphasis in the original).

Scope and form of media discourse

In previous research on issues such as genetically modified food (Maesele et al., 2017), government crises (Raeijmaekers & Maesele, 2014) or internment policy (Reul et al., 2018), an analytical framework of CDA has been developed to analyze the ways in which media discourse closes or opens debate on underlying ideological disagreements. Two analytical aspects of media discourse have been identified as key in this regard: its scope and form (Maesele & Raeijmaekers, 2017, see also Carvalho 2008: 167-171). Scope informs us on what is being addressed, while form pays attention to how this is portrayed (see table 1). Scope is determined by looking at the prominence or exclusion of particular topics/angles, social actors (with a focus on the predominant subject and who gets to set the terms of the debate or achieves framing power), and viewpoints. This allows us to identify the ideological preferences at play in a particular discursive construction. These preferences are visualized with the help of fault lines. These represent a dimension of competing preferences about what constitutes progress with regards to specific referents. In the case of climate change, previous studies have revealed how nature and the economy play a central role (see also Carvalho, 2007; Hopwood, Mellor and O’Brien, 2005). The techno-environmental fault line symbolizes contention between different preferences regarding the technological relationship between humans and their environment. The socio-economic fault line represents competing preferences regarding economic progress and equity. It is important to stress that these preferences are not fixed positions or blueprints of an ideal society, but rather different directions for techno-environmental (more or less human control over the environment) or socio-economic progress (more or less public control over the economy).

Form is determined by looking at lay-out (e.g. pictures, size), and linguistic and discursive strategies. The analysis of discursive strategies is the priority, since these reveal whether a particular discursive construction closes or opens the debate. The key strategies in this regard are (de-)legitimization, and (de-)naturalization. When these are used as mechanisms of *exclusion*, particular boundaries are enforced to limit the debate (i.e. (de-)legitimization) or dismiss it entirely (i.e. naturalization), and thus *depoliticize* climate change. For example, preferred actions are legitimized as scientifically validated, economically viable or morally right, while alternative claims are delegitimized as scientifically invalidated, economically unviable or morally wrong. In that case, we expect to find a discursive construction which distinguishes “responsible” from “irresponsible” actors and demands, based on the assumption of an existing scientific, economic or moral consensus about what climate change is and what should be done about it. In this process, the site of struggle is shifted from ideological disagreement to a struggle between “right

and wrong”. We refer to this as the scientization, economization or moralization of climate change, respectively. Meanwhile, a *naturalization* takes place on two levels: one, a naturalization of that particular course of action the “responsible” actors are demanding, and two, a naturalization of those particular ideological preferences about which a consensus is presumed.

On the other hand, those key discursive strategies can also be used as mechanisms of *exposure* or *expansion*, precisely to (re-)open the debate. In the former case, the use of depoliticizing strategies in ongoing debates is exposed and criticized, for instance by revealing the underlying interests, values and assumptions in particular representations. In the latter case, the debate itself is expanded by introducing and legitimizing alternative actors and viewpoints, and by shifting the form of the debate. We speak of *politicization* when these alternative arguments are grounded in axiological or ideological terms. For instance, climate disruption is represented as the consequence of collective choices that can be altered. This process of politicization opens up the space for ideological disagreement about alternative courses of action (and the political projects related to these), with the potential for transformative, socio-environmental change.

	CLOSE debate	OPEN debate	
	<i>Mechanisms of exclusion</i>	<i>Mechanisms of exposure</i>	<i>Mechanisms of expansion</i>
SCOPE <i>What/who is being addressed?</i> Topics, social actors, preferences	Privileging of (established) actors and preferences	Identification of actors and preferences as privileged	Introduction of (alternative) actors and preferences
FORM <i>How is it portrayed?</i> Lay-out, linguistic and discursive strategies	DEPOLITICIZING De/legitimization in rational/moral terms: scientization, economization, moralization Naturalization	Identification of discursive strategies as depoliticizing	POLITICIZING De/legitimization in ideological terms Denaturalization

Table 1. Scope and form of media discourse. Adapted figure from self-reference.

Data collection and case selection

For this study, we selected the two generalist, elite newspapers of the Dutch-language press in Belgium, *De Standaard* and *De Morgen*. Both outlets are the “quality newspapers” of one of the two remaining Dutch-language print media groups, *Het Mediahuis* and *De Persgroep*. They are characterized by a Christian-democratic and social-democratic ideological background, respectively. Despite relatively low circulation numbers, such newspapers are generally preferred over popular newspapers in content analytical studies, because they have an important agenda-setting function for opinion leaders, the public and other media (Carvalho, 2007: 226).

Figure 1 presents the results from a frequency analysis^{iv} which examines the monthly number of articles on climate change between January 2000 and March 2013. This frequency analysis is important to allow us to make an informed choice about which “critical discourse moments” to analyze in-depth. Critical discourse moments are selected cases marked by topical (scientific, political, etc.) events about which news reporting can be compared to examine how a news outlet’s discursive positions are confirmed, challenged or elaborated (see also Carvalho, 2007, 2008).

Figure 1. Frequency analysis of monthly attention for climate change in *De Standaard* and *De Morgen* between January 2000 and March 2013.

In general, the graph reveals how media attention follows the United Nations climate process, with annual peaks in November/December during the climate summits. During these summits, also referred to as Conferences of the Parties (COPs), government

representatives of all signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meet to discuss international climate policy. The UNFCCC is an international environmental treaty, signed in 1992, with the objective of stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that avoids dangerous climate change. Taking up Carvalho's (2008: 164) call for a time-sensitive discourse analysis that combines the analysis of "simultaneous depictions" in different news outlets with "temporal sequences and evolutions" within the same outlet (Carvalho, 2007: 227), a research design was created consisting of three periods with an interval of about six years (i.e. 2000-2001, 2006-2007, 2012). We learned from the frequency distribution that these were deemed relatively important periods in terms of attention by both *De Morgen* and *De Standaard*. Because of space restraints, this paper focuses on the four COPs that took place during these periods^v: COP6 in The Hague, COP6bis in Bonn, COP12 in Nairobi, and COP18 in Doha. In the literature, climate summits have been put forward as the most important climate events in terms of media and political attention, and have also been said to set the terms of the climate debate (Berglez, Höijer & Olausson, 2009; Carvalho, 2007). For the discourse analysis, all climate change-related articles were collected published between one month before the start of a summit and one month after the last day, by manually going through the physical newspapers. This three period-research design was preferred over including COP15 in Copenhagen about which such a high number of articles was published that their analysis would have negatively impacted the possibilities for historical comparison (the historical COP21 in Paris took place after this study was finished).

Furthermore, since alternative media representations of climate change remain insufficiently researched, one alternative news outlet was included to identify possible alternative discursive constructions. The news website *DeWereldMorgen* differentiates itself explicitly from mainstream, commercial media in terms of organization and content. Financially, it relies on a combination of sponsoring from civil society, government subsidies and reader contributions. Journalistically, it works with both professional and citizen journalists, and explicitly pursues ideals of transparency and reflexivity rather than (the pretense of) objectivity (Pepermans & Maesele, 2017). *DeWereldMorgen* is included only in the analysis of COP18 since it was founded in 2010. Data were collected via its online archive and *Google*. This resulted in a total data collection of 377 articles (see table 2).

	<i>De Morgen</i>	<i>De Standaard</i>	<i>DeWereldMorgen</i>
COP6	27	24	
COP6bis	23	23	
COP12	73	70	
COP18	89	23	45
Total	215	122	45

Table 2. Overview of number of articles for each outlet per COP.

Each of these articles served as a unit of analysis. In line with the hermeneutic-interpretative tradition of CDA (Carvalho, 2008; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), each was read, re-read and compared in terms of scope (prominence or exclusion of particular topics/angles, social actors, and viewpoints/preferences) and form (lay-out, linguistic choices, discursive strategies). In doing so, the focus was on how the same event was depicted in the different news outlets and on how choices in terms of scope and form changed over time. The eventual purpose of the analysis was to identify recurrent clusters of ideological preferences and discursive strategies across the selected news outlets, and recognize and name these as mutually exclusive discursive constructions. During this process, it became clear that those particular journalists who reported most consistently about these climate summits, and who were most probably assigned by the newspaper to cover them (they are further referred to as the “leading journalists” for each outlet), provided most input for defining these discursive constructions. Once these were defined, we went back to the original texts and selected the most illustrating text fragments, and titles and leads of articles for each. These were then translated by the authors.

Analysis

Three discursive constructions emerged from the analysis: (i) Techno-Optimism, Regulatory Skepticism, (ii) Consensus-Oriented, Regulatory Optimism, and (iii) Policy Struggle, Climate Justice. Since each of these advocates a different approach to climate policy, we present these by focusing on the discursive strategies which are key in explaining how a particular policy approach is (de-)legitimized or (de-)naturalized by the leading journalists on climate change for each news outlet (or others, when no leading journalists could be identified). The ideological preferences underlying these policy approaches are discussed in the concluding section when we come back to answering the central question whether and in what ways these discursive constructions either enable or disable disagreement about their ideological preferences. Below, the three discursive constructions are discussed chronologically per COP. Unless one or more elements are already mentioned in the text, the newspaper articles are referred to as: (author, “title”, *newspaper*, date).

COP6(bis)

Bollen & Van Humbeeck (2002: 100-108) give an elaborate description of the stakes and themes at COP6 and COP6bis. COP6 took place between 13 and 24 November 2000 in The Hague (The Netherlands). During this summit, industrialized countries failed to find an agreement about the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty that commits its signatories to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 5% compared to 1990. Resultantly, governments had to reconvene for a COP6bis between 18 and 24 July 2001 in Bonn (Germany). The Bonn agreement was signed, ensuring the survival of the Kyoto Protocol, although without the United States, which had pulled out under president George

W. Bush. This ministerial compromise resulted in a more voluntary and market-based Kyoto Protocol.

Techno-Optimism, Regulatory Skepticism

This discursive construction consistently serves the aim of delegitimizing binding, regulatory emission reduction targets, while (implicitly) advocating (market-driven) technological innovation to mitigate climate change risks. In doing so, it is found to rely on the discursive strategies of economization and scientization, and infrequently on moralization.

The strategy of economization serves to distinguish the “unaffordable”, “costly”, “extreme” and “unrealistic” demands for anticipatory regulation by “irresponsible” actors, such as the IPCC, from the “affordable”, “cost-effective”, and “economical” policy responses by “responsible” actors, such as business associations. These policy responses include a shift from taxation on labour to pollution through carbon markets with the aim of championing energy efficiency (e.g. Wouters, “Greenhouse effect creates jobs”, *De Standaard*, 09/11/2000), and a focus on nuclear energy (e.g. Bogaerts, “Federation of Enterprises in Belgium makes a plea for new nuclear plants”, *De Morgen*, 13/11/2000), and geo-engineering (e.g. Bogaerts, “Swelling storms threaten insurance industries”, 31/10/2000). By shifting the site of struggle to a matter of (inter)national competitiveness and business profitability, this strategy of economization evaluates policy strategies from the perspective of potential costs and profits for business.

Second, a discursive strategy of scientization is relied upon to deproblematize climate change, which is illustrated by the following quote from the lead of an article with the title “Tossing a coin” (20/11/2000), by foreign affairs journalist Antoon Wouters, who is the leading journalist in *De Standaard* during COP6 with 18 out of 24 articles: “It remains tossing a coin with the climate, because nothing is as unpredictable. The scientific evidence that the emission of greenhouse gases is changing the climate is worth billions. No scientist has ever won this price.” Further within the article, climate change is labeled just a “belief” or “theory”. This amplification of scientific uncertainty serves to de-authorize the UNFCCC and legitimize a policy shift away from the global regulation of greenhouse gases.

Moralization is found in the depiction of politicians as self-interested, power-hungry and dishonest agents, who time after time fail to come to an agreement to take the “right” decisions (e.g. Wouters, “A lot of hypocrisy at climate conference”, 15/11/2000). The climate negotiations, and the UNFCCC in particular, are put forward as an arena of power politics between blocs of nation states (in this case, the United States and its Anglo-Saxon allies versus the European Union) which pursue their self-interest first and foremost, rather than as an effective institutional framework to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Remarkably, in “Green ministers swallow disarmed Kyoto Protocol” (24/07/2001), Wouters represents the European position (which was influenced at the time by various

Green Party environment ministers) as an irresponsible obstruction to agreement, because it disengages the United States from the process: “The many Green ministers that are co-governing Europe today talk about a ‘historical compromise’. Not out of ecological, but political reasons: the isolation of the United States and strengthening of European leadership.” This accusation of “political” motives serves to question their honesty and integrity as well as their capacity to deliver an outcome that reflects anything other than their self-interest, which is a desire to control the international community, rather than saving the environment. At the same time, this framing legitimizes the US’ preference for equal responsibilities, also referred to as a level playing field between poor and rich countries, which allows to preserve national competitiveness by reducing emissions at an equal cost.

This discursive construction figures in both *De Standaard* and *De Morgen*. However, while it is central in the reporting by *De Standaard*, it only figures in the reporting of one particular journalist in *De Morgen*: Dirk Bogaert, a science journalist, who is the leading journalist on climate change during COP6 with 17 out of 27 articles (but slowly disappears from the picture from COP6bis on). In these articles, he draws only on the above discursive strategy of economization, but not on scientization or moralization. For Bogaert, policy options such as nuclear energy, carbon trading or geo-engineering provide a rational middle path to survival, between catastrophic climate changes (which he does not deny or deproblematize), on one hand, and an economic crisis (that would result from the unilateral regulation of greenhouse gases by industrialized, western countries), on the other.

Consensus-Oriented, Regulatory Optimism

This discursive construction is found to consistently advocate a binding multilateral agreement about anticipatory mitigation through the UNFCCC, and more specifically, the ratification of the Kyoto protocol. This discursive construction, which is only found in *De Morgen*, is positive and optimistic about the effectiveness of such a global framework. In contrast to its counterpart, it dramatizes climate change as an actual and urgent problem, linking it to anthropogenic causes and various extreme weather events, and assessing climate science as consensual, certain and authoritative (e.g. Serneels, “Greenhouse effect will make Belgium shiver”, 25/10/2000). It is sustained primarily by the (generally entwined) discursive strategies of scientization and moralization. It is characterized by a leading narrative in which the “scientific” and “moral” demands of those “responsible” actors, who contribute to a binding multilateral agreement, are continuously distinguished from the “unscientific” and “immoral” demands of those “irresponsible” actors, who are found to obstruct such an agreement (mainly the US, climate sceptics and fossil fuel lobbies). This mechanism of exclusion is based on a presumed scientific and moral consensus about what climate change is and what should be done about it. In doing so, UNFCCC’s Kyoto Protocol is naturalized as the inevitable and necessary framework for

climate policy, while other views and options are excluded. This leading narrative is illustrated by the following excerpt from an article about the summary for policy-makers of the IPCC's 3rd assessment report (Carpentier, "Mankind stokes the earth", 13/07/2001):

The report puts pressure on countries to ratify the Kyoto-protocol during the climate conference in Bonn next week. This extensive publication of the cream of the crop of the scientific world means an obvious reprimand to Bush' attitude and states clearly that nobody can ignore this phenomenon anymore.

The scientization of climate change is exemplified by putting science forward as a normative basis for policy, thereby implying that debate is unnecessary, as we find "the cream of the crop of the scientific world" being positioned against the epistemically-vacuous demands of the American government and climate sceptics. This scientization is sustained by moralization, as climate policy through the Kyoto Protocol is transformed from a political decision into a moral responsibility which stands above debate, implying that anyone who disagrees is ethically wrong. Meanwhile, the US government (and its allies) is consistently depicted as "the obstructionist", "the boogiemanager", "the irresponsible climate criminals" and "ethically completely reprehensible" (Carpentier, "Green hope against all odds", 18/07/2001). On the other hand, framing power is awarded to a variety of actors, including climate scientists, representatives from environmental NGO's, and delegations from developing countries. The Belgian federal environment ministers from the Green Party, in particular, are represented as the "green hope" and as examples of moderation, compromise and feasibility. Furthermore, the responsibility for emission reduction is attributed to western, rich countries and the principle of common, but differentiated, responsibility is supported: "The West must come to a reduction of greenhouse gases ... In the end, the rich countries are at the root of the greenhouse effect, which mainly threatens the Third World" (Van Scharen, "Conference president Pronk pleads for Realpolitik", 14/11/2000). In other words, agreeing on the Kyoto Protocol is the right thing to do, both morally and rationally.

COP12

With the Kyoto Protocol finally coming into force in 2005, the 2006 climate summit in Nairobi (Kenya) was the first where discussions were held about its follow-up, in which both industrialized countries and key "developing" countries such as China and India would be included (Boykoff, 2011:116). Discussions at the summit revolved around new targets for carbon emission reductions as well as the creation and management of funds for assisting developing countries with mitigation and adaptation.

Techno-Optimism, Regulatory Skepticism

By 2006, both Bogaert and Wouters have left their respective newspaper. As a result, this discursive construction has vanished from *De Morgen*, but continues to be central in *De Standaard*. The most significant difference with regard to COP6(bis) is that arguments about scientific uncertainty have largely disappeared. In the editorial “Suddenly everybody sees the impending apocalypse” (02/11/2006), Karel Verhoeven (co-editor of the newspaper) and Dominique Minten (foreign affairs journalist who is now the leading reporter on climate change) explicitly link this discursive shift to recent scientific findings:

It rained reports and warnings about the environment last week. The reports sketch a portrait of an impending apocalypse and they are coming from authoritative institutions. They signify the turn in the minds that has happened across the globe. Doubt or soothing debate is out of the question.

It is interesting to note that this changed assessment of climate science is represented as corresponding with a worldwide “turn in the minds”, rather than a deliberate journalistic choice, implying that scientific consensus is a recent phenomenon and that the newspaper has always been in tune with evolutions in science. Resultantly, climate change is now also represented as a potentially catastrophic problem through a frame of scientific certainty and consensus. At the same time, pessimism about attempts to mitigate climate risks through political negotiations on an international level continues to be combined with optimism about the possibilities of market mechanisms to decouple economic growth from pollution. However, this is now legitimized by different interpretations of scientization and economization.

For instance, the coverage of the influential Stern Review published just before the summit puts forward a novel understanding of economization which highlights the costs of global warming : “apocalyptic, that will be the cost of global warming if the world does not interfere” (Hinsliff, “Global warming can cost the world economy up to 5.5 trillion euro”, 30/10/2006). It legitimizes “interference” in the form of price mechanisms and investments in technology by both developing and industrialized countries. Likewise, the International Energy Agency’s World Energy Outlook 2006 report is interpreted as a call for techno-optimism: in “IEA portrays a clean energy future” (Sertyn, 08/11/2006), it is suggested that combining energy efficiency with nuclear and renewable energy production will allow us to solve climate change without drastic, transformative changes. Similarly, Verhoeven and Minten’s editorial separates ineffective political attempts to set binding emission reduction targets (“Kyoto, which is a consensus model and has the disadvantage of going very slow”) from effective progress through science and technology (“Scientists show that big changes will have to come from ambitious, technological innovation projects”, see also Minten, “Technology must save the world”, 08/11/2006), which does not interfere with markets or national competitiveness. This reveals a particular understanding of scientization that differentiates policy responses as either rational, when

based on technology, and irrational, when not, thereby implicitly delegitimizing regulation as anti-technology while legitimizing a deregulatory approach as technological.

A discursive strategy of moralization continues to be used to represent politicians as self-interested, quarreling actors, thereby feeding further skepticism about regulation. Furthermore, the adherence to equal responsibilities for developing and developed countries is repeated in combination with a rejection of unilateral Belgian regulation. This is illustrated by the consistent delegitimization of “big polluters” China and India who refuse to take on the same regulatory targets as the EU and the US, on one hand, and the minimization of any potential impact of further unilateral regulation of emissions in Belgium (“Belgium means nothing on a world scale”), on the other (e.g. Verhoeven & Minten, “Suddenly everybody sees the impending apocalypse”, 02/11/2006), thus ignoring Belgians’ historic contribution to the issue^{vi}. In 2006, the climate change debate is no longer represented as a matter of the EU versus the US, or between “believers” and “disbelievers” of climate science, but rather as one between developing and developed countries, while taking sides with the latter. At the root of this lies a disagreement about choosing for the most cost-effective way to reduce greenhouse gases (the underlying preference of this discursive construction) or choosing for taking (historic) carbon (consumption) per capita emissions into account (more in line with its counterpart). However, this disagreement about alternative interests, perspectives, values and policy choices is never made explicit.

Consensus-Oriented, Regulatory Optimism

There are no substantive differences for this discursive construction compared to 2000-2001. The need for a binding multilateral climate agreement, this time in the form of a follow-up to the Kyoto protocol which includes the US, China and India, is still represented in *De Morgen*’s reporting as the product of a presumed scientific and moral consensus about what should be done. Resultantly, different conclusions are drawn from both the Stern Review and the IEA’s World Energy Outlook 2006. The former is addressed in “*Kyoto cannot wait anymore*” (Vuylsteke, 30/10/2006), in which further engagement through Kyoto is legitimized by means of a strategy of economization (“it is cheaper to mitigate greenhouse gases now than to adapt to the consequences later”). From the World Energy Outlook, a similar conclusion is drawn based on a strategy of scientization, as the headline “Even Kyoto does not save the climate” (Decoo, 08/11/2006) compares the insufficiency of the existent policy framework with “what science demands”.

At the start of the summit, more multilateral regulation is presented as the summit’s goal (Delputte, “Nairobi must pave way for post Kyoto-framework”, 06/11/2006) and the relevant actors are differentiated in the following terms: either as (i) ethically responsible heroes who are perceived to contribute to an agreement (“the climate-engaged EU and 35 other countries”); (ii) ethically, irresponsible villains who seem to obstruct a consensus (“the renowned polluters such as Australia and the US” and climate skeptics); (iii) passive

victims (“the African continent which threatens to suffer the most from global warming and is the least prepared for it”); or as (iv) “new” players (“fast growing new economies such as China, India and Brazil which need to be convinced to engage in the struggle against global warming”). During the summit, China is increasingly put in the category of the villains.

Despite also minimizing and criticizing the outcome of the summit (Serneels, “After the summit in Nairobi: the disillusionment”, 20/11/2006), this discursive construction refrains from questioning the entire process (like its counterpart does), but blames particular actors instead (“China and the US let their self-interest prevail over the general interest”) who are held responsible for the lack of “a working program to halt global warming after 2012”. These lexical choices demonstrate that the climate debate is not represented as an ideological disagreement, but is framed in terms of a presumed consensus about what the “struggle against global warming” or “saving the climate” means, to which one can be engaged and collaborative, or disengaged and obstructing.

COP18

The 18th Conference of Parties took place in Doha (Qatar) from 26 November to 8 December 2012. Ever since 2006, the annual COP’s had been preoccupied with finding a follow-up to the Kyoto protocol involving both developing and developed countries. After COP17 resulted in promises about such a new multilateral treaty to be agreed on at COP21 in 2015, COP18 was the summit where the negotiations would start. In addition, the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol itself (which was set to end in 2012) was on the table. Here a third discursive construction emerges from the analysis.

Techno-Optimism, Regulatory Skepticism

By 2012, *De Standaard*’s earlier technological optimism about the prospects of mitigation has turned into fatalism: authorized by referring to various scientific reports, climate change is now presented as an inevitable and in many ways already irreversible process. Consequently, a multilateral framework for further reducing emissions is now put forward as both unfeasible and insufficient at the same time. This is illustrated by science journalist Steven Stroeykens’ article “Is it already too late for the climate?” (25/11/2012), published a few days before the summit, in which he juxtaposes the dire predictions of climate science with the failing responses of politicians:

Last week American scientists published a comparative study of climate models from which appeared that the most pessimistic ones are the most reliable [...] The most obvious idea, reducing emissions quickly and drastically, is at this moment completely politically unrealistic. Even if the climate summit in Doha runs smooth, the agreed measures won’t be more than mere eyewash.

This pessimism about both climate change and climate politics serves to legitimize a focus on investments in adaptation, about which *De Standaard* remains optimistic, assuming that technologies such as dikes can control the worst consequences: “What remains, is to keep on muddling through with half measures and meanwhile prepare us as good as possible on the coming heat and its consequences.” This discursive construction is perpetuated by Minten, still the leading journalist, in “Fiddling at the margins” (26/11/2012), published on the first day of the conference. *De Standaard*’s pessimism and fatalism is also apparent from the low number of articles published during this summit (23 compared to 89 in *De Morgen*).

This negative framing of attempts to regulate greenhouse gas emissions is sustained by a strategy of economization that starts from the assumption that mitigation is only rational if all major countries participate, or what has previously been referred to as the principle of a “level playing field”, which business organizations in Belgium consistently advocate. For instance, when Minten argues that “A Kyoto II actually comes down to setting up a non-smokers table in a bar where everybody continues to smoke”, he distinguishes the “big polluters” China, the US and India, who refuse to participate (to preserve their economic interests), from “the climate friendly” and therefore “isolated” European Union, whose efforts toward regulating greenhouse gas emissions are put forward as ineffective and therefore irrational.

Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of the 2°C threshold and the epistemic discussion about whether it is attainable or not reveals the further scientization of climate change (e.g. Minten, “Climate summit is a flop again”, 08/12/2012). Such temperature targets, which indicate the threshold for dangerous climate change, make use of the metaphor of climate policy as a global thermostat. In this way the language of science is used to represent political goals and value-laden choices as objective, rational and neutral, while concealing the potentially divisive, and inherently ideological, choices which have to be made in order to limit the rise of temperatures. By focusing on that goal, rather than on the economic and social conditions that go hand-in-hand with it, climate politics is reduced to the process of translating science into policy (Hulme, 2009: 191).

Consensus-Oriented, Regulatory Optimism

In contrast, there are no substantive shifts or differences here: a binding multilateral climate agreement about emission reduction targets is still advocated based on a presumed moral, scientific, and economic, consensus. What is remarkable however, is how *De Morgen*’s now leading science and environment journalist Barbara Debusschere’s reporting on various scientific reports before the summit, for instance by the World Bank (e.g. “World Bank expects warming of four degrees”, 20/11/2012), creates a sense of urgency regarding the necessity of climate action, while at the same time neither of these articles specifies how emissions should be reduced. Climate policy is not linked to specific policy

instruments such as carbon-trading, or wider ideological preferences and interests, but is simply depicted as “action”, implying that there is only one rational way to reduce greenhouse gases (see also her editorial by the title “Rational”, 24/11/2012). At the same time, it is important to note that an institution like the World Bank has been a longtime supporter of carbon trading-mechanisms.

Furthermore, Debusschere also increasingly relies on a strategy of economization to legitimize a shift towards a green, low-carbon (market) economy (e.g. “Greening economy must happen six times faster”, 19/11/2006). However, this green economy is not represented as an alternative ideological project to the existent socio-ecological model, but as a matter of neutral and necessary technocratic management and investment in which one can be a leader (Germany) or a laggard (Belgium or the United States). This is increasingly authorized by referring to claims by various powerful, economic actors, as the following headline shows: “Investors are now joining the struggle against global warming” (Debusschere, 21/11/2012). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that 9 out of 24 pages of *De Morgen*’s climate supplement, published two days before the summit, are devoted to green advertisements about products and services ranging from ethical banking to recycled paper. In other words, “Consensus-Oriented, Regulatory Optimism” has embraced market mechanisms as an answer to climate change.

The eventual outcome of the summit is slated in several articles for failing to achieve a binding climate agreement. In “Climate summit ends in big disappointment” (Persson, 10/12/2012), all governments are held responsible for the standstill: “the divided Europe which was not able to make a stand and lost the goodwill from developing countries”, “China, which avoided making any kind of sacrifice”, and especially, the “passive”, “stubborn”, “obstructionist” United States. Coverage blames the failure to the irrationality and immorality of world leaders. The editorial “The predictable flop of Doha” (Eeckhout, 10/12/2012) goes even a step further and argues that maybe democracy in itself, and short-term thinking of voters and consumers in particular, is what stands in the way of an ethical and rational response to climate change.

Policy Struggle, Climate Justice

In the reporting on COP18, another discursive construction emerges, one that also consistently advocates a binding multilateral agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but at the same time actively delegitimizes the existent marketization of climate policy. It represents the prevailing policy framework as the outcome of a political struggle over the ideological direction of climate policy. This discursive construction is central in the reporting by *De WereldMorgen*, but can also be found in the opinionated sections of *De Morgen* where its journalists are not the main writers, with multiple interviews, opinion pieces and columns involving activists (e.g. Van de Perre, “The myth of the green economy”, 24/11/2012; Balthazar, “When does the doctor come?”, 06/12/2012; Kenis, “The naïve ones of the climate”, 08/12/2012).

This discursive construction is characterized by discursive strategies whose primary aim is to expose and challenge the interests, exclusions, values and choices underlying the existent ideological direction of climate policy. This can be illustrated by the following quote from “Climate summit in Qatar: what is there to expect?” (Lievens, *DeWereldMorgen*, 21/11/2012):

Even if decisions are reached at the summits, their direction is not that interesting. In Cancun in 2010 a choice was made for voluntary instead of binding agreements, the role of emissions trading and carbon offsetting was emphasized, and the World Bank was given a primary role in the management of the Green Climate Fund [...] Insofar as action was taken, it went into the direction of the ‘green economy’ in its most liberal sense. As a result, the world was on its course to warm by 4 or 5 degrees [...] For those still in doubt: climate change will increasingly become the social issue of the 21st century. If we want change, this will imply grass-roots organizing, instead of obsessing over the impasse in the climate negotiations created by global elites.

This discursive construction represents the climate debate as a conflict between global civil society, grass-roots activists, youth organizations, concerned citizens and governments from the Global South, on one hand, and global elites, industrial lobbies and Western governments, on the other, with both sides involved in an ideological struggle to push climate policy in different directions. It exposes the dominant direction of climate policy and expands the debate by putting forward strategies for action (grass-roots organizing). Framing power is generally achieved by the first group of actors who use it to problematize “Rich industrial countries [...] developed countries [...] big economies like the US, Canada, Japan and the European Union” (Leahy, “Anger and frustration at climate summit in Doha”, *DeWereldMorgen*, 07/12/2012), and the financial and fossil fuel sectors (Leahy, “Oil industry hampers Doha”, *DeWereldMorgen*, 06/12/2012), for their role in the marketization of climate policy: both in the field of emission reductions through the expansion of cap-and-trade mechanisms (e.g. Kenis & Lievens, “From carbon bubble to emission speculation?”, *DeWereldMorgen*, 06/12/2012) and in the assistance to developing countries through the use of private instead of public finance (e.g. Lenferna, “Climate summit COP18 in Doha: negotiating about a Green Climate Fund or Green Corporate Fund?”, *DeWereldMorgen*, 26/11/2012). This marketization is exposed as part of a particular ideological project: the “green economy” project, which is criticized for re-appropriating climate change for the agenda of continuous economic growth, thus promoting nothing more than “green capitalism”. Repeatedly, it is emphasized that a choice between the ideological projects of the “fossil fuel economy” and the emerging “green economy” is a false choice, since both leave the existent social structures intact.

Accordingly, the real choice we are confronted with is a choice between either continuing with existing socio-economic and techno-environmental logics or expanding our choices by making a fundamental break with both and devise a climate policy based on climate justice (e.g. Kenis, “The naïve ones of the climate”, *De Morgen*, 08/12/2012).

For *DeWereldMorgen*, that relies primarily on the international alternative news agency Inter Press Agency (IPS) for its news, this implies that climate change and policy are approached from the perspective of the existent asymmetries and inequalities between developing and developed countries, and that the devastating consequences for people in developing countries are repeatedly highlighted (e.g. “Europe, North-America and Japan must do more efforts than developing countries with similar CO2 emissions” in Ockerman, “Is the climate broke?”, *DeWereldMorgen*, 22/11/2012; Leahy, “China and Brazil demand 100 billion dollar climate aid”, *DeWereldMorgen*, 28/11/2012). In other words, this discursive construction openly endorses and highlights the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. The summit itself is also evaluated from the perspective of developing countries, constantly arguing that industrialized countries should implement higher and stricter emission reduction targets and provide adequate climate funding.

Discussion

The critical discourse analysis of media discourse on climate change during four summits reveals that mainstream, commercial news media indeed contribute to manufacturing consent by depoliticizing the issue of climate change. The discursive construction of “Techno-Optimism, Regulatory Skepticism”, which was central in the reporting by *De Standaard* throughout the period of analysis and in *De Morgen* during COP6, is found to depoliticize climate change by relying primarily on discursive strategies of economization and scientization. These serve to (re-)construct climate change as a technological and economic issue, amenable by technological fixes and market forces. In doing so, a productivist interpretation of techno-environmental progress is naturalized, one which conceptualizes nature (including the climate) as a resource that can be mastered through unlimited scientific and technological progress and economic growth. Furthermore, an individualist interpretation of economic progress is naturalized which assumes that both the generation of the “goods” (wealth) and the handling of the “bads” (risks) is best achieved through the use of market forces. By relying on economization and scientization, this discursive construction redefines the site of struggle in terms of right versus wrong, thereby shielding these policy demands and their underlying values from contestation, and closing democratic discussion.

The second discursive construction of “Consensus-Oriented, Regulatory Optimism”, which was central in the reporting by *De Morgen* from COP6bis on, is also found to depoliticize climate change, but relies on different interpretations of those discursive strategies. In contrast to its counterpart, however, both the support for anticipatory mitigation in the form of a binding multilateral agreement and the principle of

common, but differentiated, responsibility reveal that it starts from a more egalitarian and ecologist view of progress. The former refers to an interventionist policy logic, in which the state regulates greenhouse gas emissions and redistributes wealth from developed to developing countries to assist the latter with the mitigation of and adaptation to climate risks. The latter refers to a view that stresses the limited carrying capacity of the climate and advocates limits on both particular (carbon intensive) technologies and economic growth with the aim of harmonizing society's relationship with nature. However, these egalitarian and ecologist values serve to build the case for government intervention to "green" the status quo, without touching the main tenets of free-market capitalism and neoliberal globalization. Here also the debate is presented as a struggle between "right and wrong", again disabling these ideological preferences from contestation and discussion.

A third discursive construction ("Policy Struggle, Climate Justice"), on the other hand, which was central to *De WereldMorgen* and also featured in the opinionated sections of *De Morgen* during COP18, is found to enable ideological disagreement about the direction of climate policy, by relying on politicizing discursive strategies. While this discursive construction appears to have much in common with "Consensus-Oriented, Regulatory Optimism", both in terms of policy principles (anticipatory mitigation in the form of a binding multilateral agreement based on common, but differentiated responsibility) and ideological preferences (egalitarianism and ecologism), the differences are nonetheless fundamental (see also figure 2). First, instead of naturalizing one course of action, "Policy Struggle, Climate Justice" exposes the values, interests and assumptions underlying dominant policy choices and expands the debate by proposing alternatives. As a consequence, climate change is constructed as an issue involving key political choices between different policy strategies, and the political projects which are related to these. Second, "Consensus-Oriented, Regulatory Optimism" starts from a restricted scope of the socio-economic fault line, one in which climate change can be mitigated and adapted to within the context of free-market capitalism and neoliberal globalization (as if particular "immoral" and "irrational" actors and demands are the only obstacles to a solution), which is not recognized or addressed. "Policy Struggle, Climate Justice", on the other hand, expands the scope for debate to these ruling political-economic models, and in doing so, addresses and challenges the structuring influence of their values and interests on climate policy, and the climate in general. Consequently, this opens up a discursive space that recognizes the contingency of existent social structures and the power relations underpinning them, thereby enabling ideological disagreement about alternative policy frameworks (and the alternative sustainable futures or political projects related to these).

Figure 2. Ideological preferences of the selected news outlets.

Most interestingly, this paper shows that depoliticizing climate change is not tied to one particular ideological project or policy approach: although we find both newspapers manufacturing consent by closing down the space for ideological disagreement, they are advocating fundamentally different policy approaches based on opposing ideological preferences. So in the end, we can conclude that the quality newspaper market in Flanders allows for media diversity, but not for media pluralism. Media diversity refers to a situation in which selected news outlets advocate different ideological preferences/viewpoints, but abstain from discursively connecting them as part of a larger and, more importantly, *legitimate* ideological struggle (Maesele & Raeijmaekers, 2017). When news outlets not only advocate different ideological preferences but also present them as such, thereby

stimulating ideological debate, there is media pluralism. Only the discursive construction of “Policy Struggle, Climate Justice” allows for this. This implies that this study discerned instances of media pluralism, but only during COP18, in the opinionated sections of *De Morgen*, and when *DeWereldMorgen* was involved in the design. Although one could easily criticize the inclusion of this alternative news site in the research design for only 1 summit, its added value however is apparent in showing how it is possible to report on climate change (policy) in way that enables ideological disagreement about alternative policy frameworks, while still clearly taking sides. And moreover, in showing how commercial news media’s ideological diversity is still restricted in the sense that a debate about (alternatives to) the social structures underlying the problem of global climate disruption is disabled, and the possibility of a radically different society is concealed.

In the end, this study confirms Carvalho’s earlier findings that ideological preferences about society’s relationship with nature and the role of government in the economy are internalized in climate change reporting through journalists’ interpretation of the facts, selection of actors, and evaluation of associated policy goals (Carvalho, 2007). Furthermore, the identified discursive constructions share some similarities to the ideological cultures she revealed in British news media. *De Standaard*’s “Techno-Optimism, Regulatory Skepticism” bears many similarities with the ideological culture of *The Times* in the UK, which also starts from individualist and productivist ideological preferences. During COP6(bis), *De Morgen*’s combination of “Techno-Optimism, Regulatory Skepticism” and “Consensus-Oriented, Regulatory Optimism” can be said to be comparable to the ideological culture of *The Independent*, since it also relies on different journalists who start from different ideological preferences. During COP12 and COP18, *De Morgen* and *DeWereldMorgen* align with the ecologist and egalitarian outlook of *The Guardian*. Compared to Carvalho, the added value of the analytical framework used in this study is that, in addition to the ideological preferences that are key in understanding the discursive reconstruction of climate news, it also reveals how a particular discursive reconstruction is characterized by strategies that either enable or disable ideological disagreement about these ideological preferences.

Finally, these discursive constructions also share many similarities to the three kinds of influential public intellectuals Nisbet (2014) has recently identified in the Anglo-Saxon world. He found these to differ in their problem framings of climate change and outlooks on nature, technology, climate policy and social change. The first discursive construction resembles the profile of “the ecomodernists” who argue for investments in energy innovation to decouple growth from environmental impact. The second one is similar to the preferences of “the smart growth reformers”, who call for a binding, international agreement to steer economic growth in a sustainable direction through price incentives. The third one is similar to the preferences of the “ecological activists” who problematize capitalism and call for grass-roots action to come to a new localized, renewable economic system under public control. At the same time, it is important to

emphasize that it would be unfair to reduce the identified discursive constructions to these archetypes. First, these discursive constructions serve as different examples of how similar events can be interpreted and re-constructed as they unfold, in a particular journalistic context. Second, the ideological preferences underlying the identified discursive constructions are hardly made explicit in the reporting, but can be inferred from the discursive strategies and how they are being used. In other words, the focus and sense of purpose is different for the journalists and public intellectuals involved.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Interestingly, this instrumentalization of science to defend or denounce policy preferences is also practiced by climate skeptics in amplifying scientific disagreement to undermine regulations (Cfr. *infra* “Techno-Optimism, Regulatory Skepticism” during COP6).

ⁱⁱ Neoliberal globalization is a form of economic integration of national economies, which extends market values and relations across social domains. International environmental governance discourse has been criticized for failing to politically interrogate the causal role of neoliberal globalization in the creation and endurance of environmental problems, and for advocating the market as a tool for tackling climate change (and creating new opportunities for economic growth in the process rather than addressing the role of economic growth in environmental disruption) (see also Kenis & Lievens, 2015).

ⁱⁱⁱ It needs to be noted that the politicization of climate change is often understood, in both public discourse and the scholarly literature, as a politically motivated suppression or amplification of the state of climate science. This paper starts from a different approach to politicization and understands the instrumentalization of science as a form of depoliticization instead. For more information on these different approaches in the literature, see Pepermans & Maesele (2016).

^{iv} The relevant data were collected by using the following Boolean string in the Belgian digital press databank Gopress: (climate change) OR (global warming) OR (greenhouse effect) OR (greenhouse gases) OR (greenhouse gas) OR (climate summit) OR (climate conference) OR (climate agreement) OR (climate report) OR (CO2 emissions) OR (IPCC). Each article was retained in which one of these key words was mentioned in either the headline or lead paragraph.

^v The elaborate media analysis can be found in an unpublished PhD dissertation (Pepermans, 2015).

^{vi} According to the most recent figures by the Carbon Atlas (2016), Belgians are globally ranked 35th in terms of per capita carbon production, 11th in terms of per capita carbon consumption and 4th in terms of historic carbon consumption.