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**Constructing rights and duties towards climate change:
citizenship and governance in mediated discourses around the world**

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Abstract

While its causation is highly differentiated across the globe and across social groups, the enhanced greenhouse effect is already having worldwide impacts ranging from temperature increase to extreme weather events. The issue raises key questions of responsibility for governments, business and individuals. In this context, the definition of rights and duties in connection to greenhouse gas emissions has become the subject of a discursive battle, which has generated divides between industrialized and developing economies, and within each of these groups of countries. This paper briefly analyzes a sample of political and media discourses from the USA and China, as part of a longer-term plan to examine the cases of the UK, Australia, Portugal, Brazil, India and Saudi Arabia. The following questions will be addressed in the paper: How are the positions of these countries' governments legitimated? How are their citizens' economic, political and social rights and duties in relation to climate change constructed? How are the governments and citizens of other countries represented?

Introduction

Addressing climate change presents various types of challenges - and so does communicating (about) it. The problem will require all countries – and especially the ones with large emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) – to adopt mitigating policies. However, because this is an issue that is so strongly linked to economic life, international differences in levels of development have to be taken into account. The solution adopted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol is no longer viable as GHG emissions of several of the countries thereby exempted from limits have been growing very rapidly. Some argue that to warrant justice and equity, GHG emissions must be considered not per country but per capita (e.g. Meyer, 2000). Others disagree with this principle. Whatever the standpoints of the different players, it is imperative that some agreement is reached in order to avoiding extreme climate change. Forms of debate that are truly political, in the sense of dissecting a complex public problem, the options that are available and the potential consequences, are more needed than ever.

The media is a crucial space of political communication. Media discourse is socially constitutive as claims, positions and choices gain political life and the proponents thereof become accountable through the publication of given discourses. The media are an important arena for legitimation and critique of political and economic alternatives and play a key role in the construction of the subject positions of governments and citizens (e.g. Fairclough, 1995; Chilton, 2004).

The research questions that underpin this paper are the following: How are the positions of governments on climate change legitimated in the media? How are their citizens' economic, political and social rights and duties in relation to the issue constructed? How are the governments and citizens of other countries represented? The paper is part of a more extensive project that includes the comparative analysis of a sample of media and governmental discourses in the USA, UK, Australia, Portugal, Brazil, China, India and Saudi Arabia. The study covers key political documents and six weeks of coverage (spread over six months) in one influential newspaper of each country. Obviously, this is a very limited selection as one newspaper cannot be representative of the whole media picture of one country. In order to compensate for this limitation, the following criteria have been defined: that it is a “quality” paper; has a large circulation; is viewed as influential; is considered (relatively) independent.

Here, I will only report the case studies of USA and China. For the USA, the choice of the *New York Times* was relatively simple. Chinese governmental control of the press inhibited the fulfilment of all the selection criteria, so, together with language accessibility, this led to the choice of *China Daily*, an English-language paper that is controlled by the Communist Party of China and is normally considered as a key news source for foreigners, such as diplomats and businessmen. It has the highest circulation of English-language newspapers published in China and its website registers several million hits every day (China Daily, 2008).

Before we move on to the analysis of discursive practices of governments and newspapers on climate change, it is important to briefly review current knowledge on the topic. That is the purpose of the next section.

Social meanings of climate change: what research has shown

As a multi-faceted issue, which relies on expert knowledge to be identified and understood, climate change is open to multiple constructions of meaning. As documented by academic research, a variety of individuals and institutions have attempted to shape public understandings of the matter in the last two decades and the media have been the main arena for promoting viewpoints and agendas (e.g. Carvalho, 2005; McCright and Dunlap, 2000; Weingart, Engels, and Pansegrau, 2000). Predictably, science has had an important place in this mediated 'conversation' but policy and economic issues associated with climate change have, after the initial years, gained a large proportion of media space (e.g. Trumbo, 1996). Concomitantly, other social actors, and especially governments, have often had more framing power - that is, the capacity to structure media representations - than scientists, although knowledge-claims have continued to play a crucial role in the discussion.

Even though a great deal has been voiced by politicians and been written in the press about the international politics of climate change (with intergovernmental summits often having polarized media coverage of the issue), there has been little consideration of the many forms of international inequity and injustice involved in GHG emissions and climate change (e.g. Carvalho, 2007a). Economic growth and unlimited use of energy have normally been presented as taken-for-granted rights with

win-win discourses of 'ecological modernization' being pervasive in many countries (e.g. Carvalho, 2007b; Ereaut and Segnit, 2006).

Citizens access information, arguments and viewpoints about climate change mainly through the media, which therefore have an important influence on their perceptions of the issue (e.g. Corbett and Durfee, 2004). At a more fundamental level, perception of their own (potential) political agency also depends on the media/ed discourses that people consume. As suggested by the notion of 'mediated citizenship' (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2006), the media have a key role in the construction of ideas of the 'citizen', their rights, their responsibilities and their space for political action. In most public discourses on climate change, the 'good citizen' is implicitly expected to adopt a pro-environment behavior even though most of the messages s/he gets from the media advertise and glamorize, in one way or the other, material consumption and traveling.

We will now proceed to a critical analysis of the discourse of the Chinese government and of the *China Daily* on climate change.

China's official discourse on climate change and the *China Daily*

China is now the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, a title held by the USA until 2007. Its per capita emissions, however, are still a fraction of the average Western countries'. Currently one of the world's major economies, China has been in a process of rapid transformation of its economic fabric and is already a powerhouse of technological innovation. It can be argued that this adds to its responsibility in finding responses to climate change, in spite of the relatively low emissions of each of its citizens.

Writing in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Isabel Hilton noted a significant transformation in the public standing of the Chinese government.

There was one place where China's assumption of the title of the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases came as no surprise: Beijing has anticipated and planned for this moment. Until earlier this year climate change was hardly mentioned in the Chinese media. Now the government is encouraging newspapers, radio and television to report on the subject (...). (Hilton, 2007: n/p)

As Hilton suggested, the Chinese government's sudden emphasis on climate change may be partly explained by its concerns with the country's international image of a "peacefully rising" power' (2007: n/p). China's responsibilities on climate change may be perceived as detrimental, especially given prior widespread criticism of the Bush administration for its refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

The opening sentences of China's National Climate Change Programme (also published in 2007) clearly mould climate change as a development issue, and therefore as something that must be viewed and treated differently for different countries:

Climate change is a major global issue of common concern to the international community. It is an issue involving both environment and development, but it is ultimately an **issue of development**. As noted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (...), the largest share of **historical and current global emissions** of greenhouse gases has originated from developed countries, while **per capita emissions** in developing countries are still relatively low and the share of global emissions originating from developing countries **will grow to meet their social and development needs**. (Chinese National Development and Reform Commission, 2007: 2; my emphasis)

The discursive construction of climate change within the economic and social framework of 'development' by China, as well as by countries like India and Brazil, has been a key aspect of the international negotiations towards preparing a post-Kyoto agreement. The entitlement to development has thus been a central argument in the rejection of commitments by these countries. As this is, in many ways, a *moral* argument, it is all the more powerful in the legitimation of the position of China and other countries in the international politics of climate change.

There are other interesting discursive choices in the excerpt above. Rather than starting by analysing the practices that explain its own contribution to climate change, China places itself in the bulky block of 'developing countries', most of which are obviously incomparable to China's economic might¹. China is nonetheless quick to

¹ Lewis (2007: 162) notes that '[d]eveloping-country solidarity has been used as a strategy since the early days to influence climate change negotiations, despite the growing economic differentiation and often disparate climate policy interests within the developing world.' She also points out that 'China has historically associated itself with the G-77 despite not having the problem of limited weight in

distance itself from that generic concept by labelling itself as a ‘developing country of responsibility’: ‘[a]s a developing country of responsibility, China attaches great importance to the issue of climate change.’ (Chinese National Development and Reform Commission, 2007: 2) The document also states that ‘[g]uided by the Scientific Approach of Development, China will **sincerely** carry out all the tasks in the CNCCP’ (ibidem; my emphasis). A certain ambiguity is created in this discourse in relation to China’s status, responsibilities and rights in the international politics of climate change.

The Scientific Approach of Development is China’s current official socio-economic ideology. It is geared towards creating a ‘harmonious society’ and includes a concern with man-nature relations. China’s official line in international relations is summarized in the following words of former Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing (2005): ‘Peace, Development and Cooperation - Banner for China’s Diplomacy in the New Era’.

China’s position on climate change has been marked by the view that ‘developed countries should face up to their historical responsibilities, take the lead in cutting emissions and honor their commitment on technological transfer and financial aid to developing countries’ (Chinese Prime Minister speaking at an Asean summit; Xinhua, 2007). Nevertheless, Chinese authorities claim that the country has been undertaking multiple measures to mitigate climate change, from ‘economic restructuring, energy efficiency improvement, development and utilization of hydropower and other renewable energy, ecological restoration and protection, as well family planning’ (Chinese National Development and Reform Commission, 2007: 4). China has also set its own targets on GHGs to be met in 2010, which include cutting energy intensity of GDP by 20 percent from the 2005 level and freezing industrial emissions of nitrous oxide at the 2005 level (Xinhua, 2007).

After a brief analysis of the Chinese government discourse on climate change, we will now move to the media. How did *China Daily* represent climate change? A quick check of the newspaper suggests that the issue has recently gained a prominent status in the Chinese public sphere: a search with the phrase ‘climate change’ returns 635 documents for 2007, an increase of over 5-fold from the previous year. While the

acting alone. Rather than acting alone, it can use the G-77 block as protection against being singled out.’

issue was largely silenced for a long time it is now clearly foregrounded in the Chinese media.

Table 1 – Number of articles in *China Daily* containing the phrase ‘climate change’

Year	Number of articles
2001	15
2002	16
2003	20
2004	53
2005	101
2006	117
2007	635

The data used for this paper consisted of articles that focused specifically on climate change or where the issue was one of the main themes (e.g. articles on energy policies adopted to fight climate change) in the second week of each month from November 2007 to April 2008. Both the months and the weeks were randomly chosen. Like for the periods covered in table 1, the keywords used in the search were ‘climate change’ but there was a subsequent selection of articles that led to excluding those with mere passing references to the issue.

Table 2 - Articles on climate change in *China Daily* (Nov. 07-April 08)

Period	Number of articles
8-14 November 2007	8
8-14 December 2007	22
8-14 January 2008	10
8-14 February 2008	2
8-14 March 2008	2
8-14 April 2008	18

The 13th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-13) that took place in Bali in 3-15 December 2007 clearly motivated a higher-than-usual coverage. This follows a tendency found in media of other countries for peaks in coverage to occur at the time of international summits (Carvalho, 2005). *China Daily* also carried a quite high number of articles in the second week of April 2008, which does not appear to be linked to one single event.

Headlines such as ‘Environment protection way forward for Asia’ (11 April 2008) immediately indicate that China has decided to give environmental issues a centre stage position. In stark contrast with its tradition of environmental neglect, the Chinese government now even tries to present itself as a leader on climate change: ‘India to follow China’s green lead’ (headline from 14 April 2008).

Given its editorial line, it is no surprise that *China Daily* recurrently eulogizes China’s climate change policy, as immediately testified by the following headlines: ‘UN climate change chief impressed by China’ (8 November 2007); ‘EU praises efforts to fight global warming’ (8 November 2007); ‘China on right path to a land of green’ (14 December 2007); ‘China’s green efforts praised’ (14 December 2007).

One can obviously argue that there is plenty of propaganda in *China Daily* but a few instances of critique can also be found, even if they are the exception. The fact that one article quotes the following words of Barbara Finamore, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, is an example.

"The extent to which China’s pollution and environmental impact are affecting the rest of the planet has never been seen before. To produce \$10,000 worth of product in China, China uses seven times more resources than Japan, six times more resources than the US and, most embarrassing, three times more resources than India," she said.
(Massand, 2007)

Nonetheless, these harsh facts are juxtaposed with the following paragraphs:

Finamore was encouraged that the Chinese government has announced in their five-year plan "what may be the most ambitious energy program in the world", because the aim is to cut energy use per GDP by 20 percent by 2010.

"Most remarkable to me is the effort at the central government level to rate the performance of local government officials and factory owners on how well they meet energy and environmental targets. In fact, the law has now been amended," she said.
(ibidem)

The fact that these are the closing words of the article makes the moral of the story clear.

In general, there is almost no consideration in *China Daily* of the practices that make the country the biggest emitter of GHGs. Contrastingly, China’s official position of attribution of responsibility to developed countries to combat climate

change is clearly present in the discourse of *China Daily* (e.g. ‘Developed nations have ‘responsibility’ to cut emissions’ by Z. Haizhou, 11 April 2008). In several pieces, this position turns into a discourse of accusation. One telling piece is authored by a researcher with the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations and headlined ‘Carbon rights a ‘power game’’ (9 April 2008). He employs strategies such as blaming, construction of oppositions and generalization and even some instances of military, war-like language.

Britain, Germany and Japan (...) are all poised to **seize this opportunity to grab the steering wheel of the world climate order vehicle.**(...)

The US has opened its own bag of "counter tricks" in response. (...)

What is worrying is that the **political game play** between the US, Japan and the EU has put China and other emerging markets in **its strategic target range.** (...)

The problem is that the indigenous manufacturing industries of China and other emerging markets still lag far behind developed countries and the high standard of emission reduction quotas **will surely perpetuate the gap between the two worlds and even expand it.**

It is obvious the US, Japan and the EU **are all focused on their own interests in the carbon rights game** and have overlooked the overriding determinant of political inspiration. The carbon rights game theory of the US, Japan and the EU will ultimately establish their leading positions in the industry and the **"retention of relative advantage" by making sure the productivity gap remains in the future.**

The late comers in manufacturing will thus be kept at a **strategic disadvantage** by the major players in this **"power game"** and **again denied a crucial means for economic development.**

(Junhong, 2008; my emphasis)

In contrast with this divisive discourse, the newspaper repeatedly attempts to portray China as a cooperative country in the politics of climate change, as illustrated by articles in the period under examination about plans to make alliances with countries like Australia (Xiaoyang and Haizhou, 2008), Japan (Zhaokui, 2008) and Sweden (Haizhou, 2008).

It is also worth mentioning that there are several references in *China Daily* to population growth as an important factor in the fight against climate change (e.g. ‘Birth rate reduction ‘best way’ to save planet’’ by DPA, 11 April 2008). This issue is also mentioned in China’s Climate Change Program. Population growth has been a near-taboo in the international politics of climate change. Both developed and developing countries are in uncomfortable positions in this respect, with most European countries struggling with an aging population and most developing

countries continuing to experience high birth rates. With its track record of demographic control, China tacitly claims the moral high-ground in relation to an issue that is vital to GHG emissions.

Climate change in American politics and in the *New York Times*

With approximately 4% of the world population and almost a quarter of the world's GHG emissions, it is only fair to expect that the USA would invest a major effort in addressing climate change. Instead, the country has opposed international agreements to limit emissions with George W. Bush's refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol having generated worldwide criticism. The line taken by the President in 2001 - namely that combating climate change was contrary to American (economic) interests - has been softened in the last few years with the country engaging in several bilateral and multilateral international initiatives, such as the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate, which are nonetheless strictly voluntary and, some argue, possibly aimed at disrupting the post-Kyoto process.

The policy challenge is to act in a serious and **sensible** way, **given the limits of our knowledge**. While **scientific uncertainties remain**, we can begin now to address the factors that contribute to climate change.

(George W. Bush, 'Discussion on Global Climate Change', 11 June 2001, opening quote in White House webpage on 'Addressing Global Climate Change': Whitehouse, 2008; my emphasis)

While the White House website includes references to various measures and claims that the USA is the biggest financial contributor to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the emphasis is still on scientific uncertainty and therefore on a pragmatic, 'sensible' approach, which is another way of saying 'we will continue stalling'. Despite the federal performance, a number of American states, from California to New York, have started independent programmes to control GHG emissions, including, in some cases, obligatory quantitative targets for corporations operating in their space.

How has the *New York Times* been representing climate change? It can be argued that, in the last few years, the newspaper has in general kept a critical and

vigilant stance in relation to official authorities and often called for more and better action on climate change. In the period under examination, articles headlined ‘At Divided Climate Talks, Consensus That U.S. Is at Fault’ and ‘Gore Joins Chorus Chiding U.S. at Climate Talks’ (14 April 2008) exemplify this tendency. Another example is an editorial where pressure was put on Stephen Johnson, the head of the Environmental Protection agency, to adopt several measures (‘Mr. Johnson’s Unused Authority’, 11 December 2007); after discussing them, the *New York Times* wrote “[w]e urge him to move rapidly on all of these fronts.” Two days later another editorial entitled ‘A shameful presidential threat’ vehemently criticized the White House’s threat to veto an energy bill that would set new energy efficiency standards.

How are the rights and duties of Americans in relation to climate change constructed? How is the role of the newspaper’s readers portrayed? Is this even an issue in the media discourse? Unlike other newspapers, the *New York Times* has carried several articles referring to the actions and views of citizens on this matter. Lou Beach’s ‘Don’t let the green grass fool you’ (10 February 2008), for instance, examined the impact of suburban living on climate change with the contribution of a series of stories of innovative behavior by individual citizens and county councils which get a favorable light. Examples are the cases of progress in the revival of the use of clotheslines to save energy and the construction of roads for children to walk or bike to school. These experiences feel empowering and may stimulate akin attitudes in readers.

One piece headlined ‘Any other bright ideas?’ (by Julie Scelfo, 10 January 2008) discussed the barriers to switching from incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent ones. The main barrier is allegedly an aesthetic and emotional one as fluorescent lights are perceived as cold and characterless. The article compared various brands and types of light bulbs, presented the top choices and suggested that part of the problem may be the mere adjustment to change.

Felicity Barringer wrote a piece on the situation of several cities in terms of containing GHG emissions on 7 February 2008 (‘In many communities, it’s not easy going green’). The emphasis here was on the difficulties in cutting emissions. While some of those difficulties have to do with structural reasons, such as urban design, others come down to pretty relative things, such as Christmas lights or the aesthetic values of homeowners’ associations. And while the author vented some moderate criticism of the rejection, by homeowners’ associations, of plans to build houses with

solar panels, private grand displays of Christmas lights seemed to deserve her respect: ‘in Austin, Tex., - a city that ranks high on any list of green strivers - some residents want to help but do not feel they can afford it. DeVonna Garcia’s family won an award for its beautiful outdoor display of Christmas lights - but she stayed with her old-fashioned incandescent bulbs, hearing that a friend paid \$600 for energy-efficient lights.’

Further on in the article, Barringer wrote about home insulation:

“We have an old house,” said Kevin Clark, who is 41 and a professor of instructional technology at George Mason University. “We got double-paned glass. We could feel the air coming in through those nice wood frames.” Between the \$13,000 cost of that repair and the money for a new refrigerator and other appliances, energy efficiencies have cost Mr. Clark and his family about \$18,000. Though they have cut monthly electric bills, he is not sure how much he is saving.

The last statement raises doubts about investment in energy efficiency. However, the maths is not difficult: why did the reporter not calculate how much Kevin Clark is saving?

The finishing line is also revealing of the author’s standing on this issue:

[Laura Fiffick, the director of the office of environmental quality in Dallas] added: “A lot of cities have said, ‘We’re going to be carbon-neutral by 2020.’ To me, the idea is to figure out what emissions we are going to go after and what we can do and then set the goal. When you set the bar too high, it becomes demotivating.”

Barringer is here pacifying an attitude of small incremental remedies for climate change and opposition to more ambitious goals.

Obstacles to behavioral change are also constructed by Christopher Jensen in ‘Tiny saves gas, but big can save lives’ (13 April 2008). By comparing the safety records of big cars with small ones, this piece foregrounds the issue of death risk in driving and creates an opposition in relation to energy efficiency. Given the choice, it is not hard to predict what readers would go for.

Articles such as Barringer’s and Jensen’s pose a series of questions about the ethical and social roles of the media in relation to (some of) the causes of climate change. Robert Cox (2007) has recently argued that Environmental Communication is a ‘crisis’ discipline with a special ethical duty. The unprecedented scale and urgency

of global environmental problems, especially climate change, may indeed be viewed as a call for a stronger engagement of the media. Some may consider that it is an ethical imperative for journalists to question, rather than legitimate, taken-for-granted but dispensable things like large Christmas light sets.

In the sample examined here, two of the articles in the *New York Times* presented some interesting reflections on corporate responsibility on climate change. By looking at the carbon policies of some companies, these pieces raised the issue publicly and thereby created a form of pressure to perform. On 7 November 2007, Harry Campbell wrote about some companies' attempts to find carbon-neutral suppliers, after having introduced other 'green' measures (in 'For suppliers, the pressure is on'). Any steps to reduce emissions are obviously made on a voluntary basis:

“‘We don't say, 'Reduce greenhouse gases or we won't buy from you,' because it's better if people see their own interests aligned with greenhouse-gas reduction,” said Susan Tomasky, executive vice president for shared services at American Electric Power’.

The no-cost requirement of such measures becomes apparent in the article: “‘If we have two bids that are equal in every other way, of course we prefer the company that seems to share our values,” Mr. Sullivan said. “It's a question of brand compatibility.’”

So how committed is business to combating climate change? If companies are willing to go green only when they do not have to pay for it, how strong are environmental concerns? Is this just one more form of 'greenwashing'? These are important questions and so is the role that the media play when reporting about such issues. The inclusion of considerations about the no-cost nature of corporate greening policies in the piece analysed above is in itself a form of public exposure. However, to the extent that the newspaper does not question those positions, it also authorizes them. In fact, the news piece may even be viewed as a way of marketing those companies.

One significant piece in terms of monitoring business performance focuses on carbon-offsetting and how the money that companies pay for it is being used ('F.T.C. Asks if Carbon-Offset Money Is Well Spent', by Louise Story, 9 January 2008). Here, there are references to 'greenwashing' and pressure for accountability.

Besides the USA, how are other culprits on GHG emissions represented in the *New York Times*? On 8 December 2007, the newspaper published a long piece entitled ‘Trucks Power China’s Economy, at a Suffocating Cost’ (by Keith Bradsher). This was one of a series of articles and multimedia examining the ‘human toll, global impact and political challenge of China’s epic pollution crisis’. This piece focuses on the impact of trucks in air quality and claims that the pollution is making the Chinese people sick and slowly killing them. The gravity of the situation is made clear by qualifiers such as ‘choking’ and ‘highly noxious’.

Parts of this report are told from the viewpoint of Chinese citizens. There is humanization of Chinese people by writing about their daily lives, their aspirations and their struggles. Hearing about their pains, their savings and their pet birds, the reader is led to feel closer to these persons. The Chinese government is blamed for the inadequate legislation on emissions. However, there is some empathy for the country when the article refers to the financial cost that improving the situation would mean and the difficulties it would create for people. The Chinese government is to some extent ‘understood’ in view of its concerns with ‘inflation’; still, it is repeatedly accused for lagging behind in setting standards for emissions.

India – whose toll on climate change is already one of the biggest in the world and is quickly growing – is not subjected to the same type of criticism as China in the *New York Times* in the period that is under examination. There were two pieces that focused specifically on India. On 7 November 2007, Thomas L. Friedman wrote on the opportunities that energy programming and monitoring represent for India in a piece entitled ‘The Dawn of E2K in India’. Here, India is framed as a world leader in Information Technology, given the large numbers of people skilled in this area, and the combat against climate change is associated to a good economic prospect for that country.

In a story entitled ‘Indians hit the road amid elephants’ (Somini Sengupta, 11 January 2008), the main characters are the members of an Indian middle-class family and their ‘dream’ of buying a car. Around their stories, we are told about the numbers of new cars that are put on the roads every day and the poor conditions of road infrastructure. Climate change is mentioned à propos the reaction of Rajendra Pachauri, the head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to the huge increase of car sales in India. Pachauri allegedly criticized Tata Motors, a company

selling large amounts of cheap small cars, for not investing instead on mass transportation. But, unlike the piece on China, this one does not present a gloomy picture of India. On the contrary, there are rays of optimism and hope in this account on the transformation of economic and social life in Asia.

Even in the pieces of analysts like Paul Krugman (who is considered a progressive liberal), China is somewhat chastised with references to the ‘march of meat-eating Chinese’ as one of the factors for rises in food prices around the world. In the same piece, Krugman is very critical of American subsidies for production of corn for ethanol: ‘You might put it this way: people are starving in Africa so that American politicians can court votes in farm states’. There are some references in the *New York Times* to the impact of climate change on other developing countries and the injustice that it represents but this is typically done in generic terms that do not individuate countries and peoples (e.g. Kristof, 2008).

The potential for confrontation between industrialized countries and developing ones is well illustrated in the two very different ways in which a report published by the International Energy Agency was discursively reconstructed in the *New York Times* and in *China Daily*.

The International Energy Agency is an intergovernmental organization that provides information and advice to its 26 industrial country members. On 7 November 2007 it issued a report on the then-current energy challenges, which the *New York Times* described as follows on the same day:

In unusually urgent tones, the International Energy Agency (...) urged advanced economies to work with China and India to cut overall growth in energy consumption.

(‘Cuts Urged in China’s and India’s Energy Growth’, by Jad Mouawad)

The onus, citizens are told, is on China and India to reduce, not on other countries.

“There is a need for an electroshock,” said Fatih Birol, the agency’s chief economist and the lead author of its flagship publication, *The World Energy Outlook*. “We have to act immediately and boldly.”

In other words, ‘we’ have to limit ‘their’ growth ‘immediately and boldly’, not ours. The Agency – and the *New York Times* insofar as it reproduced its words –

appears to be speaking in the name of ‘us’ all. Every citizen from the Western world is brought on board.

The newspaper, and the Agency, appears to concede that China and India are in a special situation.

China and India argue that it is unfair to blame them for rising energy prices (...). Energy use per person in those countries remains much lower than in the industrial nations.

In its report, the energy agency recognized the legitimate aspirations of China and India to improve the lives of their people. It said, moreover, that solving energy problems is a global responsibility that demands action by all countries. “China’s and India’s energy challenges are the world’s energy challenges, which call for collective responses,” it said.

However, the following words do not help finding international consensuses.

In the next year, China will need to install 800 gigawatts of power-generating capacity, about as much as Europe has. Its emissions per person will reach those of Europe by 2030, the report found.

“This is a very worrying message,” Mr. Birol said. “China and India are transforming **our** energy markets. We have a window of opportunity of 5 to 10 years before it becomes unsustainable and irreversible.”

(my emphasis)

The agency also claimed that ‘global energy **security** will increasingly be at risk’ (my emphasis). The securitization of energy issues is a growing phenomenon and one that can lead to severe international tensions.

Reacting to the statements of the International Energy Agency (IEA) an article published on 10 November 2007 in *China Daily* illustrates well the rhetorical clashes between two blocks of nations. It is worth quoting extensively.

(...) it makes no sense to suggest that fast-growing developing economies like China and India should assume primary responsibility for saving the world from all the alarming consequences of runaway energy demand. (...)

[The IEA] said that rapid growth in China and India meant that without radical policy changes, both countries would double energy consumption by 2030, putting pressure on scarce resources such as oil and raising emissions of greenhouse gases.

But the energy agency’s report seems to be contradictory, for it also recognized the legitimate aspirations of China and India to improve the lives of their people.

Before US drivers have made fundamental changes to their behavior in response to high oil prices, **developing countries can hardly be convinced** by

rich countries' talk of higher energy efficiency or lower energy demand growth **at the cost of their development pace**. (...)

It may take another two decades for China and India's per capita energy consumption to reach the level of developed countries, as the energy watchdog predicted. But isn't the **financially and technologically well-off world obliged** to cut its energy consumption **as soon as possible**?

(‘Global action needed’, 2007-11-10; my emphasis)

The international distribution of (material) rights and duties is again contested here. At stake in this article is the behavior and authenticity of both common people and of their governments, with climate change becoming a test to both these groups. Trust in international relations can potentially be affected.

Conclusions

Important differences – and equally important similarities – were found in the political and media(ted) discourses of China and the USA. China socially constructs the right to ‘development’ as fundamental; it appears to override all other issues and concerns. Not only is the government explicit about this national priority as it is constantly reinforced and legitimated in one of the country's main newspapers. ‘Development’ is presented as a self-evident concept; no attempt is made to define what it intakes except that it is, in this discourse, inextricably connected to emissions of GHGs.

Rather than denying climate change's problematicity, China is intent on constituting the issue into a central point of bargaining with industrialized countries. It does not acknowledge the existence of any duty or responsibility on the side of the government, corporations or citizens: the obligation to cut GHG emissions is shifted completely to industrialized countries.

While the country's government and media are adamant about China's right to continue increasing GHG emissions, they also highlight its initiatives to control such emissions. The subject position of China in the international politics of climate change is encoded ambiguously in the discourses analysed here: on the one hand, the country is presented as a developing country, implicitly *en par* with the poorest, prospectless nations of the world; on the other hand, it is portrayed as a leader.

In the *New York Times* there are more references to the national sources of causation of climate change than in the *China Daily* and the former is certainly more critical about the government than the latter. It was encouraging to find some analysis about the responsibility of corporations; still, in the newspaper's discourse they are not explicitly or implicitly expected to play a major role in the fight against climate change and, in some pieces, their current practices appeared to be justified.

The *New York Times* carried several articles referring to the actions and views of citizens on climate change. However, some pieces actually contributed to the naturalization of perceived barriers to action on climate change (the undesirable aesthetics of compact fluorescent light bulbs, the need for grand private displays of Christmas lights) while others constructed further obstacles to action (such as the alleged lack of safety of small cars if compared with big ones). Still, there were exceptions with some pieces telling the stories of individuals that are pushing for change with success. That kind of narrative can be empowering and provide hope but it is a minority.

The *New York Times* in general contributed to the legitimation of an attitude of small incremental remedies for climate change and opposition to more ambitious or radical goals. It also tended to de-politicize the role of common people in relation to this issue. There was very little in the articles analyzed here about citizens' assumedly political perspectives, attitudes or behaviors. As found elsewhere (e.g. Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005) citizens were in general constructed as politically passive, in other words, as spectators of (national and international) political decisions.

In both newspapers – and arguably in the official political discourses of both countries –, there were instances of conflict-inducing representations of climate change. Some of those discursive constructions may contribute more to deepen differences than to foster understanding. In fact, many news outlets may be working as spaces for 'othering', that is, to create distance and barriers between 'us' and 'them': 'our' readers/the citizens of our country, they say, have rights that are being threatened by 'them'/the people and governments of other countries. An 'us'/'them' oppositional construction is frequently found in the media in relation to a number of issues. Terrorism, war and immigration (e.g. Hall, 1997; Wodak et al., 1999; Graham, Keenan and Dowd, 2004) are examples of matters often shaped by this kind of discursive practice. The distinctiveness of climate change lies in the fact that no clear

'evil' can be associated to its causes. It is about 'other' peoples gaining access to things that have been long perceived as good, such as electricity, heating and improved mobility. The impacts of climate change are of course a menace but the causal link between particular causes and particular impacts cannot be established, scientifically at least. What these media discourses do is, indirectly, to socially construct consumption not only as a right, which is worth fighting to preserve, but also as a new evil. This challenges the traditional roles of the mainstream media in relation to global economics in many ways and is worth following up in future research.

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