The discursive democratisation of global climate governance

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The global governance of climate change represents one of the more profound and, to date, intractable sets of problems confronting humanity. Legitimacy, accountability, fairness, and representation matter as well as effectiveness. In the absence of effective centralised authority, these democratic norms need to be sought in a polycentric context. An approach to democratisation is advanced that de-emphasises authoritative formal institutions, and instead operates in the more informal realm of the engagement and contestation of discourses in global public spheres. Democracy here is conceptualised not in terms of elections and constitutions, but in aspirations for inclusive, competent, and dispersed reflexive capacity. Based on empirical analysis of discursive engagement in several structured settings, key challenges for improving the democratic quality of global climate governance are assessed.

Keywords: global governance; climate change; democracy; discourse

Introduction

The global governance of climate change represents one of the more profound and, to date, intractable set of problems confronting humanity. Participants in and observers of that governance (or lack thereof) are of course concerned with effectiveness in solving the range of problems that climate change presents. But questions of legitimacy, accountability, fairness, and representation also pervade the concerns and communications of actors and observers. These terms also provide the basic vocabulary of democracy. Now, there are those who argue that effective response to climate change requires dispensing with democracy so that decision-makers can get on with the serious task of implementing the measures demanded by climate science, guided by appropriate policy expertise (see, for example, Lovelock 2010). That might be an

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acceptable prescription for states that are already authoritarian. It is not going to work within democratic states, where procedural legitimacy demands that even those who disagree with policy measures get a chance to participate in public deliberation. Still less can such expert-guided authoritarianism work at the global level. The international system remains decentralised, and the most effective central authority that does exist works only to smooth the operations of markets (the World Trade Organization). Effective governance must therefore seek legitimacy and accountability in a polycentric context, and if so we ought to think about the democratic qualities of global climate governance. We explore one particular approach to these qualities that for pragmatic reasons de-emphasises the construction of authoritative formal institutions, operating instead in the more informal realm of the engagement and contestation of discourses in global public spheres.

Approaching global democracy

There are a number of different ways to think about global democracy. Almost certainly the least productive views global electoral democracy in the image of existing liberal democratic states, a non-starter in any foreseeable future. We examine an approach to global democratisation that minimises the need to establish new formal institutions, or reform existing ones. It does so by operating in the informal realm of global public spheres and the discourses they contain. The informal processes we stress could profitably co-exist with reformed public authority at the global level, and elsewhere we have explored how public sphere and public authority might be conceptualised as joined in a global deliberative system. When it comes to climate change, this system is in poor shape (but neither is it irredeemable). Here, though, we bracket such questions. Our analysis can be read as providing a way to look at the prospects for democratisation should the international polity prove resistant to more formally empowered institutions.

Respect for the fundamentally decentralised character of international politics should not be taken as absolute, but rather as a pragmatic response to contemporary conditions. The appeal of such an orientation increases to the extent that the global governance of climate fails at the peak centralised level, as epitomised by the Kyoto Protocol and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). If comprehensive and effective global agreement proves elusive, it may be time to think in terms of a broader array of governance mechanisms (joined by states, international organisations, transnational networks linking public and private actors) – what Keohane and Victor (2011) call a regime complex, as opposed to a regime. But then what might coordinate such mechanisms, such that different bits of the regime complex do not fly off in contradictory directions and a mess of ineffectual action? Our answer is that diverse arrangements may be coordinated by shared discourses, or engagement across different discourses. To the extent this kind of coordination holds, the essence of democracy can be sought in competent and

dispersed influence over the engagement of discourses in transnational public spheres, though much turns on the conditions of engagement.

Conventionally, one might enumerate the actors and interests that populate transnational public spheres (or global civil society), and chart their relationship to representation and accountability. But these actors and interests are also the carriers of particular discourses, and another way of apprehending transnational public space (consistent with contemporary thinking about deliberative democracy) maps discourses and the conditions of their engagement and contestation.

A discourse is about 'representations and systems of meaning' (Howarth 2009, p. 311). For Hajer and Versteeg (2005, p. 175) a discourse is 'an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and political phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices'. Any discourse will typically contain what Hajer (1995) calls a 'storyline' about how problems came to be (or came to be overcome) and what should therefore be done (or not done).

Why focus in the first instance upon discourses rather than actors? Ontologically, there is no obvious priority. While liberals believe it is individuals who are the ultimate units of action and concern (even when organised into collective actors), post-structuralists would see individuals as mostly creations of the discourses in which they move. The most defensible position is almost certainly somewhere between these two extremes. People are conditioned by discourses; but especially when they engage more than one discourse, space opens for reflection upon their relative merits. But the main justification for emphasising discourses is the coordinating role that discourses play, especially when formal centres of authority are weak – the normal case in international politics. Discourses are consequential because they can coordinate the actions of large numbers of individuals who never need communicate with each other directly (so a discourse of market liberalism coordinates global economic affairs). If there is such a thing as international society (as the English School of international relations avers), then its rules are shared norms which are the product of discourses. While the English School has generally seen international society as composed only of states, there is no reason why its membership cannot be extended to non-state actors.

In international relations, those emphasising the power of discourses such as realism or market liberalism have often treated them in hegemonic terms (Walker 1993, George 1994). Constructivist analysts too, deploying a somewhat different vocabulary, have often traced the history of dominant understandings of for example sovereignty (Reus-Smit 1999). However in today's world, contestation across discourses is just as likely as hegemony. Perhaps the last bastion of hegemonic discourse is the market liberalism that dominated international financial affairs until the crisis of 2008. After faltering amid crisis, that discourse showed remarkable resilience, though following crisis it may be best classified as what Fairclough (2006, p. 39) calls a 'nodal discourse' around which other discourses cluster.

Any shift from hegemony to contestation can be understood as an aspect of modernisation. Accompanying modernisation is increased awareness of discourses other than those in which one has been socialised. Giddens calls this 'de-traditionalisation' (see Beck *et al.* 1994), which can apply not just to religion and other pre-modern legacies, but also to modern traditions such as industrialism, in which the content of economic growth and technological change were once unquestioned. If such processes are accompanied by reflection, openness to alternative understandings, and critical questioning, then we can speak of reflexive modernisation. If they are accompanied by angry rejection of alternatives and retreat into the familiar by people who now understand the nature of the threat to them, we can speak of reflexive traditionalisation (Dryzek 2006, pp. 20–22), in (for example) religious fundamentalism and radical nationalism. Environmental affairs really only make sense in light of a questioning of industrialism, so here at least we need to be on the lookout for multiplicity and contestation across discourses.

Reflexive modernisation and reflexive traditionalisation alike mean that space opens for the configuration of discourses to be itself influenced by reflective choices of competent agents, simply as a result of enhanced awareness of alternative discourses. To the extent this capacity becomes dispersed and inclusive, there is potentially good news for democracy. In this light, introducing democracy into international politics has little to do with the familiar liberal assemblage of competitive elections, constitutions, and the protection of political rights. Rather, it can be conceptualised in terms of aspirations for inclusive, competent, and dispersed reflexive capacity. Discourses (like social structures in general) both enable and constrain communication. The actions of individuals and other actors may normally reinforce and help constitute but sometimes they can destabilise a prevailing discourse. The reflective choices of competent agents then ought to be able to affect both the content and relative weight of discourses (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001, p. 400). This in turn is consistent with the idea of discursive democracy, grounded in competent and dispersed engagement of discourses in the public sphere, whose outcome can affect collective decisions (Dryzek 2000).

Shifting attention from actors to discourses has implications for the way in which power is located in dominant systems of knowledge that define the natural state of the world as well as solutions to perceived problems (Barnett and Duvall 2005, pp. 20–22). Fostering inclusive, competent, and dispersed reflexive capacity is a mode of resistance whereby power is confronted by democratising the production of meaning. Structural inequalities pervade the international system, and individuals and groups have different capacities to influence global governance. But rather than shelving democratic aspirations until these inequalities disappear, our discourse approach allows consideration of how the interests of marginalised groups may be served.

How, then, does the global governance of climate change look in this light? What discourses are present, what is their relative weight, and what is the

condition of their engagement? How consequential is the interplay of discourses in the global public sphere?

Gill (2000, p. 173) points out that 'the terms "discourse" and "discourse analysis" are highly contested ... there are probably at least 57 varieties of discourse analysis'. The kind we deploy here is broadly consistent with Fairclough's (2003) 'critical discourse analysis'. It is also *political* discourse analysis in that it stresses ascriptions of agency and motivation to entities and actors, and relationships of hierarchy, cooperation, and competition embedded in particular discourses (as well as more standard features of ontology, what is perceived to exist, and key metaphors). Any discourses uncovered have a history that bears scrutiny, though they can be studied through their revelation in particular texts and verbal interchanges. The coding scheme based on these considerations has the following elements (Dryzek 2005, pp. 17–19):

- Basic entities whose existence is recognised or constructed. This is the ontology of a discourse. It might feature rational individuals, deities, social classes, ecosystems, population, generations. Correspondingly, particular discourses can deny the existence of any and all of these things.
- Assumptions about natural relationships. Relationships between entities can involve competition, hierarchy, equality, cooperation, or conflict.
- Agents and their motives. Storylines need actors. These actors can be some or all humans (citizens, consumers, producers) or groups (such as corporations, social classes, social movements, or governments). Motives might include material gain, esteem, virtue, survival. In some discourses nature itself is an agent, whether resilient and forgiving, or fragile and unforgiving.
- Key metaphors and other rhetorical devices. In environmental discourse, metaphors might be mechanical (nature is like a machine), organic, or anthropomorphic (ecosystems have a kind of collective intelligence). Rhetoric can appeal to some version of common sense, to religious feelings of guilt, or might involve horror stories about particular practices, or appeal to some idyllic vision of how life could be.

Climate discourses in the global public sphere

A large and diverse range of civil society and commercial actors populates the public sphere of global climate governance. The settings in which they interact are equally numerous and include internet chat-rooms, blogs, print and online media, citizen forums, and UNFCCC side events. Public space is crowded and busy, yet a great deal of activity occurs in the form of monologues on which others can offer a brief comment or merely register support. Petition-based networks such as Avaaz, TckTckTck, and 350.org may raise awareness and hold power to account, yet their potential for enabling citizens to *deliberate* is less certain. Settings in which groups and individuals can elaborate on their ideas in a genuinely interactive manner are rare. Rarer still are those that bring

together participants from multiple countries, North and South, in anything like a global public sphere. To distil the constellation of climate discourses, as well as the condition of their engagement, we report on a discourse analysis of four organised spaces for discussion on responding to climate change. These were the most prominent non-state summits[1] held during a 12-month period preceding the landmark 2009 Copenhagen climate summit and in its early aftermath. This was a period in which climate change attracted unprecedented public attention. The high level of formal UN activity provided much grist for the public mill as people debated how the international community should appropriately respond. Each of these settings attracted high international participation, from the North and South, providing valuable empirical material for discourse analysis.

1) *The World Business Summit on Climate Change* was held before the UNFCCC negotiations in Copenhagen to enable more than 500 invited 'global leaders from business, policy, civil society, and science ... [to engage] in dialogue on the road to a low-carbon future and the recommendations for an ambitious new climate change framework' (Copenhagen Climate Summit 2009, p. 3). A discourse analysis of the Business Summit programme pointed to a low level of diversity among contributions.[2] The vast majority articulated concerns in terms that we label 'Mainstream Sustainability' (see Box 1).[3]

Box 1.   Mainstream Sustainability.

Basic entities whose existence is recognised or constructed:
high and low carbon societies; capitalist markets; consumers; GDP; intellectual property
Assumptions about natural relationships:
competition; partnerships; win-win economy/conservation
Agents and their motives:
business – profit with a conscience
governments – ecologically benign economic growth
innovators – mixed motives, money and sustainability
Key metaphors and other rhetorical devices:
carbon footprint
green jobs
'pollution preventions pays'
reassurance

This discourse holds that action to address climate change can be defined within the parameters of the existing political economy. Competition and the profit motive are inherent in human relations, but sustainability and material growth prove compatible. Diversity emerges within the parameters of Mainstream Sustainability on the question of how climate change ought to be absorbed into existing development. For some, all aspects of global climate governance can effectively be brought under the logic of the market. Illustrative is Goldman Sachs, contributing to a panel on carbon markets, for whom

'markets are particularly efficient at allocating capital and determining the appropriate prices for goods and services'. Governments can help stimulate such markets with policy frameworks, but investors are also seen to have a role in promoting markets for 'emissions trading ... , weather derivatives, renewable energy credits, and other climate related commodities' (Goldman Sachs n.d.). For others, reducing greenhouse gas emissions presents an opportunity for low-carbon societies in which green technologies become the motor of economic development. Recognising that 'pollution prevention pays' will spur a shift away from emissions-intensive production towards technologies such as renewable energy, biochar, and carbon sequestration. 'Green growth' is possible as enterprises can profit from reducing their ecological footprint. Such confidence was expressed by contributors ranging from the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (2008) to Swiss Re (n.d.) and BP (2009) to Greenpeace (2008).

Marginally present were contentions that economic growth is compatible with ecological sustainability and a stable climate but qualified by the conviction that the ultimate objective of modernisation should not simply be a decoupling of profit and pollution in the industrialised countries. Instead, modernisation should serve human rights and needs while evening out inequalities between industrialised and developing countries. This may require mobilising local populations and civil society, and sits within a class of discourse we label 'Expansive Sustainability' (see Box 2).[4]

Box 2.   Expansive Sustainability.

Basic entities whose existence is recognised or constructed:
decarbonising economy
humans with rights and needs
technology
polluters
Assumptions about natural relationships:
possibility of international equity
responsibility
vulnerability
competition – could be fair
partnership
Agents and their motives:
states: material motives, common but differentiated responsibilities
civil society organisations: common good
Key metaphors and other rhetorical devices:
carbon footprint

Vantage Point Venture Partners (Garthwaite 2009), participating in a panel on the New Green Economy, expressed this discourse in asserting the need for developing public–private partnerships to transfer low-carbon technologies to developing countries before they become affordable. Suntech Power (2010)

used a constructed image of the earth at night to reveal areas of energy deprivation and energy-intensive prosperity. The challenge is to address both conditions, assumed possible with publicly-subsidised renewable energy. Such equity concerns were not salient in the vast majority of contributions.

One lone contributor raised questions about the existing economic order itself. Reflecting a class of discourse we label 'Limits' (see Box 3), the viability and/or desirability of existing neoliberal development is questioned, and norms including economic growth, population growth, meat consumption, and profligate material consumption criticised. The UK's Sir Crispin Tickell, participating in a panel on Business Action on Climate Change, articulated a weak version of Limits. The global liberal economy is not irretrievably unsustainable but he cautioned against 'greenwash' and pointed to the importance of new measures of societal health beyond gross domestic product (GDP) (Tickell 2009). Another dissenting voice, Youssef Nassef (2006), stressed the importance of looking beyond high-tech innovation and recognising local wisdom: 'adaptation need not entail the transfer of a lot of resources from the north to the south because we're starting to realize that there is a lot of knowledge at the level of indigenous communities'.

Box 3.   Limits.

Basic entities whose existence is recognised or constructed:
ecological limits
(rejects GDP)
development that is not growth
Assumptions about natural relationships:
human dependence on natural world
Agents and their motives:
self-interested states, mostly with unsustainable policy goals
potentially: states with enlightened self-interest
Key metaphors and other rhetorical devices:
ecological footprints
one planet
danger of ecological collapse

2) *The Business for the Environment Summit* convened in April 2009 to discuss risks and opportunities presented by climate change (B4E 2009). Here too discussion was overwhelmingly in terms of Mainstream Sustainability.[5] Particularly salient were assumptions that business opportunities can be found in economic and ecological crises (e.g. Cramer 2009); governments need to provide clear and stable regulatory frameworks to encourage business investment (e.g. Ju 2009); and consumers are primarily motivated by cost-saving so effort needs to be directed towards affordable climate-friendly technology and products (e.g. Cramer 2009, Mattar 2009). Just one contributor explicitly approached the issue from an equity-oriented position. Bunker Roy (2009), founder of Barefoot College, asserted that realising sustainability will

require empowering the vulnerable and marginalised, including rural illiterate women, and de-mystifying and decentralising access to renewable power. This contribution belongs within the Expansive Sustainability class of discourse (Box 2).

Present but marginal were voices articulating concerns consistent with Limits (Box 3). The Crown Prince of Jordan, repeating Robert F. Kennedy's famous quip that GDP 'measures everything except that which makes life worthwhile', called for institutionalising new measures of wellbeing (B4E 2009, pp. 18–19). Similarly, the conclusions of a working group on 'Innovating New Business Models for a Changing World' advocated new consumption patterns; instilling sustainability values in citizens through school, church, and community groups; and rejection of designed redundancy as a profit strategy (B4E 2009, p. 20).

Opportunities for challenging the dominance of Mainstream Sustainability also came during question and answer sessions. Although most discussion did not depart from the dominant discourse, a few questions were articulated in terms of Expansive Sustainability (e.g. concerning per capita pollution permits/cap-and-share) and Limits (e.g. concerning the limit to efficiency in production and consumption). To the extent such questions induce critical reflection on the part of those articulating more mainstream discourses, this type of exchange could promote reflexive modernisation: but not if challenging questions are met with re-statement of the original discourse. We observe instances of both discursive reinforcement (e.g. per capita permits are unnecessary if new businesses emerging in the South are smarter than those in the North) and discursive reflection (e.g. efficiency does have its limits so communities ultimately need to be designed to enable lower consumption).

3) *Klimaforum09* was an open forum established alongside the 2009 UNFCCC negotiations in Copenhagen to provide space for people, organisations, and social movements to exchange ideas and experiences. An estimated 50,000 people from 95 countries attended over two weeks (Eriksen *et al.* 2010, p. 3). While ostensibly open, its political platform delimited participation (though perhaps not attendance) to those articulating certain discourses.[6] Key elements of the platform included: rejection of technological fixes; the importance of locally based solutions; mobilisation of civil society; reducing consumption and production; and criticism of exploitation of nature and faith in economic growth (Eriksen *et al.* 2010, p. 49). The forum comprised 342 activities. A discourse analysis of a sample of these activities reveals the overwhelming dominance of a class of discourse we label 'Green Radicalism' (see Box 4).[7]

Green Radicalism is defined by the assumption that unconstrained material growth cannot be reconciled with a safe climate and sustainability: a fundamental reorientation of economic development is required. Such changes demand redistribution of power. Concerns relating to human rights, justice, and equity are prioritised over short-term economic values. Green Radicalism focuses on the political and economic structural causes of climate change, and here we observe some diversity. For some Klimaforum09 participants, the key

Box 4. Green Radicalism.

Basic entities whose existence is recognised or constructed:
climate/ecological debt
global commons
humans with rights
nature/Mother Earth
ecological limits
Assumptions about natural relationships:
interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds
cooperation and solidarity
equality
diversity
popular sovereignty
Agents and their motives:
irresponsible governments and corporations
mainstream environmentalists pursuing ineffectual solutions
grassroots seeking broader understanding
nature as agent
Key metaphors and other rhetorical devices:
crisis
organic metaphors
passion
vision of another world

structural cause of climate change is development that privileges industrial-scale production, which ought to be replaced by small scale production. The Pesticide Action Network (2009), for example, argues that although agriculture is responsible for approximately one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, there is potential to feed the world sustainably if agriculture is de-corporatised, de-industrialised, re-localised, and democratised. Similarly, for Global Justice Ecology Project (2009), 'real solutions' to climate change are to be found in the sustainable practices of peasant communities and indigenous peoples whereas 'false solutions' (agrofuels, offsetting schemes) will only engender greater injustice. Others diverge from the stress on decentralisation to highlight 'new globalism': an effective and just response to climate change requires transforming the unequal international system into an equitable global community. Governance within this community ought to be democratic and foster cooperation between individuals, cultures, nations, social movements, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Existing institutions are incapable of delivering this; instead, citizens and civil society can drive the transition. Illustrative is the position of UK Climate Camp, a collective of activists and communities committed to non-state and non-capitalist climate solutions. Within this 'culture of resistance', democratic participation is more than occasionally marking X in a box. An empowering transformation can be approached through '[g]rassroots organising in cooperative, low-impact, sustainable ways' (Jasiewicz 2008, Climate Camp 2009).

Other participants articulated a feminist variant of Green Radicalism and identified the key challenge as arising from pervasive patriarchy. Not only are women's basic needs unmet by large-scale development projects, but women are also more vulnerable to the negative impacts of mitigation and adaptation measures. Climate justice ought not only be justice for the global South, but also gender justice (see, for example, Röhr 2006, World March of Women 2009).

Departing from this political focus on unequal power distribution while still emphasising underlying economic causes of climate change is the separate class of discourse, 'Limits'. A small minority in the sample of Klimaforum09 activities articulated their ideas in these terms (Box 3).[8] Prominent Limits voices constituted a panel entitled 'Limits to Growth'. Tim Jackson, for instance, has observed that '[t]he logic of free-market capitalism states that the economy must grow continuously or face an unpalatable collapse ... it is time to stop pretending that mindlessly chasing economic growth is compatible with sustainability' (Jackson 2008; see also Nørgård *et al.* 2010, Wackernagel 2010). Limits avers that reorganisation is possible within existing institutions and without any redistribution of power. Change may occur voluntarily, or through the guidance and regulation of existing authorities. Illustrative is a panel session on meat consumption. Here vegetarian organisations identified the introduction of an animal products tax and a withdrawal of all subsidies to the meat industry as 'probably the single most effective policy we can implement NOW to save the world from a climate change catastrophe' (VegClimate Alliance *et al.* 2009).

Perhaps surprisingly, given the political platform of Klimaforum09, a small number of economically reformist (yet equity-oriented) voices made their way into the programme. These voices reflect Expansive Sustainability (Box 2).[9] Illustrative is a panel organised by the International Network for Sustainable Energy (INFORSE) on 'Sustainable energy for development to reduce poverty'. This network holds that renewable energy and energy efficiency are the 'essential pillars of future mitigation actions by all countries' and can decouple emissions from economic growth, 'still the primary goal of all world governments' (INFORSE 2009).

4) *The People's World Summit on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights* was convened by the Bolivian government in Cochabamba in April 2010. The summit was designed to allow dialogue among 'peoples of the world, social movements and Mother Earth's defenders, scientists, academics, lawyers and governments that want to work with their citizens' (PWCCC 2010). An estimated 35,000 attended, about three-quarters of whom were Bolivian with others coming from 140 countries (Morales 2010). Like Klimaforum09, the People's Summit was ostensibly open but the call for participation was articulated in Green Radical terms, as illustrated in the following:

> Confirming that 75% of historical emissions of greenhouse gases originated in the countries of the North that followed a path of irrational industrialization;

Noting that climate change is a product of the capitalist system; …

Confident that the peoples of the world, guided by the principles of solidarity, justice and respect for life, will be able to save humanity and Mother Earth … .

The World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth has as objectives:

1) To analyze the structural and systemic causes that drive climate change and to propose radical measures to ensure the well-being of all humanity in harmony with nature …

6) To define strategies for action and mobilization to defend life from Climate Change and to defend the Rights of Mother Earth. (PWCCC 2010)

While a range of people may be attracted to the idea of engaging in dialogue with 'peoples of the world, social movements and Mother Earth's defenders', this representation of the problem most strongly resonates with a discourse of Green Radicalism. The resulting 'People's Agreement' is a strong expression of this discourse, although it does assume the continued relevance of multilateral institutions guided by the will of the people.[10] The People's Summit was organised around 17 working groups corresponding to themes under discussion in the United Nations (UN) negotiations, and 173 self-organised events. Like the conference call, the working groups' agendas were framed in Green Radical terms. Discourse analysis of a sample of the self-organised events does reveal a slightly broader discursive presence, though still overwhelmingly dominated by Green Radicalism.[11] As in Klimaforum09, some diversity was observed within this discourse. For some, the main structural cause to be overcome was globalised industrial-scale development that marginalises small-scale producers. Illustrative is an event organised by Plataforma Boliviana Frente al Cambio Climático on Mother Earth's rights. This network asserts that although people are partially responsible for climate change, culpability mostly lies with transnational corporations and imperialism. The solution lies in local alternative development models based on ancestral knowledge and technologies under the guidance of communities (Plataforma Boliviana Frente al Cambio Climático 2009). Similarly, Vía Campesina (2010) with their slogan 'We peasants can cool the planet!' highlighted the importance of social movements resisting further corporatisation of agriculture disguised as mitigation and adaptation. Only through small-scale organic agriculture can ecological sustainability be ensured while also protecting human rights. Moving beyond the local level while remaining within Green Radicalism are contributions highlighting 'new globalism'. The 'Peoples' Movement on Climate Change' (2008), for example, sees governments as unwilling to prioritise the interests and wellbeing of their constituents and calls instead on grassroots movements to unite and create spaces for inter-community dialogue. 'Focus on the Global South' similarly doubted the capacity of the UNFCCC to deliver fair and effective agreement. The most promising scenario is for 'movements for economic, gender and ecological justice to constitute themselves into an effective trans-border movement able to

unmask the latest schemes of pro-corporate forces and institutions to delay or obstruct genuine solutions to the climate crisis' (Focus on the Global South 2010).

Departing from the politically progressive character of Green Radicalism while maintaining its economically radical disposition were a small minority who articulated their concerns in terms of Limits (Box 3).[12] A network of theologians called on all 'institutions, organizations and people' to take responsibility and respond to the painful cries of Mother Earth. Spiritual leaders are imbued with a capacity to raise consciousness and elicit change within their congregations, while also encouraging governments to 'to assume principal responsibility in the care of the Earth' (ISEAT 2010).

Again a small number of economically reformist voices contributed to the Cochabamba programme. These tended to reflect Expansive Sustainability (Box 2).[13] The 350.org movement, for example, presses for a goal of 350 ppm[14] symbolising 'the recipe for a very different world, one that moves past cheap fossil fuel to more sensible technologies, more closely-knit communities, and a more equitable global society' (350.org 2009). No explicit critique is made of liberal capitalism, only the fuel that drives the neoliberal model of development. Similarly, the Partnership for Clean Indoor Air (n.d.) shared its efforts to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged households by improving access to solar power, but without challenging the economic system.

Engagement of climate discourses

When it comes to climate change there is no 'nodal' discourse, in Fairclough's terms (2006, p. 39). Instead, a plurality of discourses informs different understandings of the problem and appropriate governance measures. This plurality is important for democratisation. But democracy in the terms we advocate ultimately hinges on inclusive, competent, and dispersed reflexive capacity. The question then is whether the present conditions of discursive engagement foster such capacity. Our answer is, not quite. We found no forum in which Mainstream Sustainability engaged Green Radicalism. What we observe instead are discrete settings dominated by a specific discourse: Mainstream Sustainability for the two business summits, Green Radicalism for the Klimaforum and Cochabamba gatherings. Limits and Mainstream Sustainability appeared at both kinds of gathering, but only as minor themes.

The two kinds of gatherings therefore look a bit like enclaves. There is certainly a place for enclaves in democracy, but only as a place for creating competence prior to engagement with other discourses. Democratic theorists including Fraser (1992), Mansbridge (1996), and Karpowitz *et al.* (2009) argue that in stratified societies (like the international society) disempowered and subordinated individuals may only be able to 'formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' by retreating into enclaves with like-minded others (Fraser 1992, p. 123). Interviews with

participants in the Klimaforum09 declaration drafting process support this argument.[15] Many found the process a positive and enlightening one in which their understanding deepened through exchanging experiences and perspectives. Others found their understanding confirmed rather than necessarily enhanced. A recurring theme for many participants was the feeling of solidarity that strengthened throughout the process. Most participants in the business summits do not need any such boost to their confidence, so their enclave character is harder to defend.

Discursive enclaves of any sort have limitations. The most obvious is that discourses articulated only in protected settings are not exposed to critique and challenge, and outsiders are not exposed to competing assumptions that might stimulate their own reflexive capacity. As Mansbridge (1996, p. 58) notes, when people communicate only in enclaves 'they encourage one another not to hear anyone else. They do not learn how to put what they want to say in words that others can hear and understand'. Research into online communication suggests a tendency towards homogeneity because users can filter the mass of information to engage with likeminded others (though see Dahlberg 2007).

A further problem is what Sunstein (2007) calls 'ideological amplification' and 'group polarisation' (Sunstein 2003), the tendency for individuals to reinforce their commitment to existing convictions when they are supported by the majority. Regardless of the plurality of perspectives privately held, groups will become more polarised in the direction of the majority of publicised perspectives. Homogeneity displaces diversity. This means that reflexive capacity is diminished. Sunstein (2007, pp. 275–276) offers several explanations. One emphasises the association between repetition and persuasiveness. If arguments are repeatedly articulated in terms of a single discourse with relatively few arguments articulated in competing terms, the information that informs individuals' understanding of a problem is disproportionately associated with a single discourse. If a change of individual perspective occurs, then, it is likely to change in the direction of the majority.

Another explanation is that a desire to be perceived favourably by others leads people to adjust their positions toward the publicly stated majority position. Noell-Neumann's (1984) 'spiral of silence' suggests that those who perceive themselves in a minority will refrain from voice. One participant in the Klimaforum09 declaration drafting process admitted to withholding his true view rooted in an economically reformist discourse that provided scope for cost-effective technological solutions. He believed this would not find favour within a group of anti-technology NGOs.[16] This sentiment was echoed by another individual who participated in the online component of the declaration drafting process, who admitted to withholding his own views on technology while waiting for others to positively broach the subject, which did not happen.[17] A random survey of participants at the Cochabamba Summit also found that dissent from the dominant anti-capitalist stance was present yet such sentiments were never publicly shared in forums and workshops.[18] One of the most prominent features of the People's Agreement from this gathering was

the ostensible consensus that capitalism is indeed the key structural cause of climate change.

What can we say about productive engagement that would counteract such tendencies? Engagement might take the form of contestation, of the sort that occurred when anti-globalisation emerged to challenge dominant neoliberal discourse around 2000, eventually inducing international organisations such as the World Bank to change at least some practices (Stiglitz 2002). But when it comes to climate change, contestation is not necessarily productive. Consider the particularly combative discourse of denialism, which had no presence in the four forums we examined, but which is prominent in the public sphere, especially in internet forums. Organised denialism cannot provide grist for productive contestation, for at its heart is the construction of opponents not as adversaries to be respected, but as enemies to be defeated (to use the language of Mouffe 2000), with no possibility for critical engagement. Hamilton (2009a, 2009b) has documented this phenomenon in Australia. So '[w]hile the internet is often held up as the instrument of free speech, it is often used for the opposite purpose, to drive people out of the public debate' (Hamilton 2009a). Anyone who has scrolled through the comments posted on online news articles about climate politics or climate science will be aware that a denialist discourse occupies space entirely disproportionate to its relative weight in society. Such contributions are often offensive or personally insulting to the author and other commentators. The effect is to undermine fruitful deliberations on global climate governance.

Given the limitations of enclave deliberation, developing inclusive, competent, and dispersed reflexive capacity depends in part on establishing connections between spaces dominated by different discourses. We should not expect such engagement to somehow produce a 'super-discourse' that would henceforth coordinate global affairs. The range of issues that climate change covers is so large and complex that any such hegemonic super-discourse would almost certainly have major blind spots. It would take climate governance into a situation more like that of global finance prior to the 2008 crash. Engagement need not even yield what Fairclough (2006, p. 25) refers to as 'interdiscursive hybridity' or 'the combination of different discourses, and/or genres, and/or styles in texts'. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine a head-on confrontation between Green Radicalism and Mainstream Sustainability parallel to that between anti-globalisation and neoliberalism after 1999, because for Green Radicals, Mainstream Sustainability represents not the source of problems, but rather an ineffectual response. In this light, it is possible to imagine the two minor discourses present in all four forums we examined, Limits and Expansive Sustainability, as forming a kind of discursive bridge by which (initially) indirect engagement between Green Radicalism and Mainstream Sustainability is facilitated. But to play this bridging role, these two discourses would need to take greater prominence than they currently have. The idea here is not just to highlight points of commonality and sites for compromise, but also to provide possibilities for contestation and the reflection it can induce.

Conclusion

To the extent effective central authority in governance is lacking, what remains are multiple locations for decision. When it comes to climate change, these locations might exist in states, subnational governments, international organisations, markets, transnational corporations, financial networks, even individual consumers. What coordinates decisions and actions is often the discourse that spans them.

In a decentralised political setting of the kind that characterises the global governance of climate change (especially in the wake of peak global level failures), there is a tension between two roles discourses can play. One role is coordination of a large numbers of actors. The second is grist for contestation in the public sphere of the sort that offers glimpses of democracy in the absence of state-like central authority. On the face of it, coordination benefits if the number of discourses is small: indeed, it may be most straightforward when matters are dominated by a single discourse. Such was the case for the global governance of economic affairs prior to 2008, dominated by neoliberalism and associated assumptions about efficient markets. But this financial case also illustrates a democratic failure precisely because of the hegemony of neoliberal discourse. In addition, an absence of competing discourses meant that deficiencies in the operation of the financial system that in retrospect were glaring were never corrected.

The situation when it comes to climate change is very different. We have charted a multiplicity of discourses in public space that might seem to work against discourses playing a role in the coordination of governance. But the real problem when it comes to impeding coordination is the degree to which particular discourses flourish in particular enclaves.

Now, it could be argued that all that is likely in any near future is a number of islands of transnational coordination, each stabilised by a particular discourse or set of discourses. One such island might be constituted by business networks. Another might be constituted by social movement activists in alliance with post-neoliberal governments such as Bolivia. It is much easier to demonstrate the consequentiality of a discourse (or interacting set of discourses) within such an island than it is to demonstrate the more global significance of that island. We can, for example, see that climate marketisation is becoming increasingly prominent in coordinating emissions trading and offset schemes. It is less easy to judge how consequential this development is globally.

To the degree that global climate governance remains polycentric, it is necessary to think long and hard about the roles played by discourses and their potentially more effective engagement, such that we could speak with more confidence of the *global* governance of climate change. Both effective governance and democratic ideals could benefit from such broader engage-ment. For example, if climate marketisation is becoming as dominant as Paterson (2011) suggests, it would be perilous for it to proceed while ignoring the implications of markets for social justice as highlighted by Green

Radicalism. Such perils would attenuate both the effectiveness of markets in limiting or offsetting emissions; and the democratic legitimacy with which outcomes were generated. Whatever the relative standing of particular discourses in any polycentric future, both transnational democracy and effectiveness in mitigation and adaptation stand to benefit from engagement deeper than anything we see at present. We have made some suggestions for improving engagement, particularly through an enhanced role for bridging discourses that are currently somewhat marginal. But that is only a beginning. There is plenty of scope for further work on topics as varied as the role of rhetoric in bridging difference, institutional innovations in the public sphere that would create different kinds of settings for engagement, the role of performance and protest in inducing reflection, and the kinds of communication that do and do not work.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. In one case, the World Business Summit on Climate Change, government actors were among the participants, but panellists were overwhelmingly drawn from non-state sectors.
2. The sample comprised most panel discussions, interactive debates, and working groups. Special addresses, keynote speeches, and opening and closing ceremonies were excluded. A total of 67 documents were analysed. In most cases summaries of specific contributions were not available; materials analysed therefore comprised largely of work authored by each speaker or their organisation on the same or a similar theme. Although this may not convey the precise contribution made at the World Business Summit on Climate Change, such material does allow us to see which discourse governs each contributor's thinking on climate change, which in turn would be reflected in their contributions. Each document was coded according to the scheme outlined above.
3. Fifty-eight documents were classified in these terms.
4. Nine documents were interpreted as Expansive Sustainability.
5. This event was well documented with written summaries of speeches, panel contributions, and working group conclusions, as well as videos of panel discussions, including questions and answers. Most videos have now been archived on YouTube; a complete collection is held by Hayley Stevenson. A total of 46 contributions were analysed and questions from the audience which diverged from the dominant discourse noted. This sample comprised all special addresses, panel discussions, and three of the six working group summaries. Forty-one contributions were interpreted as Mainstream Sustainability.
6. In their evaluation report, the organising committee claims that '[a]t no time was it required that the participants of Klimaforum09 agreed with the platform' (Eriksen *et al*. 2010, p. 8), but it did provide a basis for accepting and rejecting proposed activities. Moreover, people wishing to participate in a pre-summit online debate

as part of the Klimaforum09 Declaration drafting process were indeed required to pledge their support for the platform.

7. Three concerns informed sample selection. First, given the time-consuming nature of discourse analysis, the entire programme of activities could not be analysed. Second, although activities were conducted in Danish, French, Spanish, and English, we could only use information available in languages in which one of us is proficient. Third, material for analysis had to be available online. Material sourced for analysis included summaries and publicity of the activity itself, and work authored by each organiser or nominated speaker/s on the same or similar topic (see note 2). Therefore, the sample comprised activities that took place in the first week of the forum, offer textual information in either English or Spanish, and associated material could be located online. Forty-nine documents associated with 42 panels were analysed. For most panels a single document was coded because the panel had a single organising group, or the panel had multiple but affiliated organising groups. For panels in which two or more unaffiliated groups participated, separate documents were coded. Thirty-eight documents were interpreted as Green Radicalism.

8. Seven of 49 documents were interpreted as Limits. Three were associated with a single panel on 'Limits to Growth'.

9. Three documents were interpreted as such.

10. This was a contentious point among participants of the PWCCC (see Stevenson 2011).

11. The three concerns outlined in note 7 informed the selection of a sample for analysis in this case. Material analysed includes summaries and publicity of the event itself, and work authored by each speaker/organiser on the same or similar topic. This sample comprised events that (a) took place in the first two days of the conference; (b) offer textual information in either English or Spanish; and (c) associated material could be located online. Events organised exclusively by governmental agencies were excluded from the analysis given our interest in discerning public climate discourses. Forty-four documents associated with 42 events were analysed. For most events a single document was analysed because the event had a single organising group, or had multiple but affiliated organising groups. For events in which two or more unaffiliated groups participated, separate documents were analysed. Thirty-four events were interpreted as Green Radicalism.

12. Four events were interpreted as Limits.

13. Six activities were classified in these terms.

14. Parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

15. Interviews were carried out by Hayley Stevenson with 27 participants. Some were conducted in person at Klimaforum09, and others were conducted by telephone in February/March 2010.

16. Anonymous interview conducted by Hayley Stevenson, Copenhagen, December 2009.

17. Anonymous telephone interview conducted by Hayley Stevenson, Canberra, February 2010.

18. Forty-nine participants were surveyed. Of these 41 responded to the question pertaining to this point. Four disagreed with the statement that 'Capitalism is one of the principal causes of climate change'. One respondent indicated that s/he did not know if they agreed or disagreed. Three others stressed that while it is a cause it is not the only cause.

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