Journalistic Narratives of Success and Failure at the Bali Climate Change Conference in 2007

Roy KRØVEL
Oslo University College, Norway

Abstract

This article investigates how journalists employed pre-defined culturally grounded meta-narratives and genres in journalistic communication of climate change at the Bali summit in 2007. The journalists investigated in this article are found to have constructed a variety of "protagonists". The most typical is based on the representative from a "tiny" state that stood up to the "most powerful nation on earth". Other varieties place the protagonists and helpers firmly within longer, well-known national narratives on nation and its role in the world. The constant ingredient in almost all narratives seems to be the construction of the "opponent", with the USA universally portrayed as the opponent who has to be defeated in order for the desired goal to be achieved.

A large majority of journalists in this selection systematically chose to construct narratives conforming to pre-defined genres, structuring and framing the information according to historically constructed notions of what the audience want. The need to construct a "good story" took precedence over the critical ideal of "informing society". From a critical realism perspective, this is problematic because ontology must have priority over epistemology.

Keywords: Climate change, journalism, genres, critical realism and narrative

Introduction

In December 2007, representatives of over 180 countries, observers from inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, and the media met at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali. The conference adopted the Bali Road Map which, according to UNFCCC, "charts the course for a new negotiating process designed to tackle climate change" (UNFCC, 2007). Mass media play a crucial role in constructing understandings of, and the politics of climate change, and society depends on robust information about the possible consequences of climate change as well as insight into problems and uncertainties in the existing body of knowledge on the subject (Cox, 2007). At the same time, journalists compete in a commercial market and are under increasing pressure to tell competitive stories that grab the attention and stand out from all the others. The role of television journalism in this respect has, in particular, been hotly debated (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Kline, 1979; McLeod & Detenber, 2006).

Since climate change issues are so complex, journalists need to frame the information. Frames have been seen as "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters" (Gitlin, 1980). Journalists

trying to report on climate change issues must deal with something multifaceted, involving detailed scientific knowledge of a range of specialties. They need to synthesise complex information, making it available to a non-specialist audience, and making some elements more salient than others (Entman, 1993). We also know that this process of "framing", of selectively highlighting certain elements and aspects, is culturally dependent, and that journalists make use of a cultural stock of existing meta-frames when reporting to a perceived audience (I will return to these issues later). For now, it is sufficient to note that they make journalistic reporting on climate change particularly interesting from the perspective of intercultural communication. How does the reporting from Bali on climate change depend on culturally grounded meta-frames? What truths are presented – explicitly and implicitly – about climate change, and how are they grounded in understandings of a natural reality or ontology?

The article is explorative. Its goal is to reflect on existing theories or hypotheses on climate change journalism in light of empirical data from journalistic coverage of the Bali conference. The selection of media will be global, thus making it possible to reflect on and contribute to the nascent field of intercultural communication of climate change issues. But there is still an urgent need for more empirical research on this topic, and this article is only a small contribution towards a theoretical reflection that could possibly guide future empirical research in the field.

Literature Overview

As the body of literature on communication and climate change issues is large and growing, it is necessary here to limit the overview to the most relevant literature related to the themes indicated in the introduction. The overview is not exhaustive. Sampei and Aoyagi-Usui have stated that "coverage of global warming had an immediate but short-term influence on public concern" (Sampei & Aoyagi-Usui, 2009). While newspaper coverage can influence public concern, others have found that coverage sometimes has the opposite effect in the long run (Hulme, 2007). Hulme criticises the British media for using words such as "final", "fears", "worse" and "disaster", even though the scientists referred to in the articles did not use them, since such language could contribute to "a climate of fear about our future climate" (Hulme, 2008), possibly leading to denial or apathy (Dilling & Moser, 2007).

In view of these and other recent studies, it is necessary to ask a question about the "climate story". In the words of Ereaut and Agnit, "can we tell it better?" (Ereaut & Segnit, 2006). According to Boykoff, journalists can first "coordinate with editors to make headlines more consistent with the stories"; they can "more effectively label sources by their affiliation"; and they can "more frequently and consistently fact-check their reporting by consulting with appropriate experts". Boykoff goes on to assert that: "Greater contextualisation within climate-science stories helps to ward off misdirected controversy and to sort marginalised views from counter-claims worthy of consideration" (Boykoff, 2008).

Most textbooks on journalism include something on the much-used terms "objectivity" and "balance" (Gans, 1980; Harcup, 2009; MacDougall, 1982; Schudson, 1995; White, 1996). In the literature on media and climate change, though, the norms of "objectivity" and "balanced reporting" have received much criticism. According to Boykoff & Rajan, "the norm of 'balanced reporting' has had a rather detrimental effect on the media coverage of climate

science and other scientific topics in the USA" (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007, p. 210). This is partly because "balance" is often a substitute for validity checks. According to Dunwoody and Peters, the typical journalist has "neither the time nor the expertise to check the validity of claims" (Dunwoody & Peters, 1992). Balance without validity checks can lead to the giving of undue attention to marginal views held by very few among the experts (Mooney, 2004).

Boykoff and Boykoff found that "… personalisation, dramatisation, and novelty" … "significantly influence" the employment of second-order norms such as balanced reporting and that, "this has led to informationally deficient mass-media coverage of this crucial issue" (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007, abstract). Employing the norm of "balanced reporting" has had different consequences for media coverage of climate change in the USA and the UK (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007; Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004), for while the media coverage in the USA was found to diverge from scientific consensus on climate change, no similar divergence was found in the case of media coverage in the UK (Boykoff, 2007).

These findings indicate a call for the inclusion of cultural perspectives in the investigation of media coverage of climate change, as argued, for instance, by Carvalho and Burgess (2005). According to Brossard, Shanahan and McComas, "… research on media coverage of global environmental issues needs to move beyond studies at the national level; cross-cultural comparisons are essential to understand how different news regimes might affect public opinion" (Brossard, Shanahan, & McComas, 2004, p. 359).

This article will contribute to existing studies on the media and climate change by focusing on the genres journalists employ when they report on this subject. Some arguments appear explicitly in a text or story on climate change while others are hidden and appear only implicitly, in the way the narrative itself is constructed. Most journalistic narratives of some length have a dramatic structure and tell the story using a cast of characters which often represent conflicting interests or ideas. A study of how conflicts between characters in journalistic climate-change narratives are constructed could therefore yield valuable knowledge about climate-change communication in the media. This type of study is particularly important in respect of Goldman's criticism of the press: "The main deficiency of the [American] press … is its style of reportage and commentary" (Goldman, 1999, p. 340).

Conflict plays a major role in the framing of issues and for the construction of narratives, and it can be a valuable tool in communicating complexities such as climate change (Hampshire, 1999). Evaluating conflicting claims is a part of daily routine for journalists (Harcup, 2009) and it means looking at both sides of a story, assessing conflicting claims and the credibility of sources, searching for evidence, and not publishing anything believed to be untrue. This ideal for journalism is fully compatible with what Goldman has called "the veritistic cause" against the distortion of truth (Goldman, 1999, p. 186). According to Goldman, the pursuit of truth can be enhanced by "good interpersonal argumentation" and "well-designed technologies and institutions of public communication" (Goldman, 2009). Goldman has taken the media to task for displacing a deeper discussion of policies with a journalistic obsession with politics as a game, saying that: "reportage on who is winning … is of minimal value to citizens trying to answer core voter questions" (Goldman, 1999, p. 314), and calling for a press comprising experts able to interpret and explain in accordance with the "veritistic ideal".

It should by now be clear that the current article is grounded in Critical Realism as a meta-

theory. Critical realists agree that all knowledge about the world and social world is fallible, but not equally fallible. Knowledge is socially constructed, but ontology must take priority over epistemology (Bhaskar, 1979 & 1989; Hackett & Zhao, 1998; López & Potter, 2005; Norris, 2005). The key questions regarding journalistic stories on climate change then become: "what truths on climate change are being told?" and "how are these truths on climate change presented (implicitly or explicitly) in relation to culturally grounded meta-narratives?"

Methodology

This is a qualitative study and, as in all qualitative studies, it is possible to select only a limited number of cases, thereby reducing the reliability of generalisations based on the results. Media from North and South America, Africa, Asia and Europe have been included. This is not meant to make the selection suitable for cross-cultural comparison, but simply to make the selected sample more globally representative than it would have been if only the European or North American media had been considered. I have also chosen to include narratives from both television and print media, hoping to account for some of the variations in journalistic narratives inherent in different types of media.

From a critical realist perspective it is not possible to perform empirical studies without, or independent from, existing theories or hypotheses. Existing theories will always, explicitly or implicitly, guide the investigation in the search for empirical data and in the interpretation of that data. Reflecting on how to interpret the data in relation to the existing hypotheses in this particular case study does not imply that we now have enough data to reach a conclusion on the issue. On the contrary, further empirical studies are needed to facilitate the process of producing robust knowledge about possible causal explanations, and this job is far from finished. Nonetheless, theories and hypotheses should not be treated as static or as if they have more explanatory power than they do have. Existing theories and hypotheses should be subjected to critical analysis as the investigation engages with empirical data. The value of reflecting on this limited number of cases should not, therefore, be seen as its contribution towards final or concluding theories or hypotheses on climate-change journalism. It should rather be considered as a contribution towards constructing a hermeneutical circle of reflection on, and testing of, existing theories and hypotheses, which in turn can guide future empirical research on the topic.

The selected reports are investigated using analysis of framing, dramatic structure, and narrative. Journalists need to choose news angles, select sources, formulate headlines and so on. Framing necessarily means "selecting some aspects of a perceived reality [to]make them more salient in a communicating text" (Entman, 1993, pp. 51-52). A frame suggests what the controversy is about and involves implicit information that gives meaning to an issue and provides a context for the interpretation of the message. Frames are a part of culture and are institutionalised in various ways, as Goffman has explained (1974). According to Van Gorp (2007), there exists a cultural stock of frames based on available alternatives, for instance, as shown by Propp in his analysis of folk tales (1968). Journalists tend to embed their stories within culturally-bound narratives, recognisable to the audience, so that new information is formulated as new episodes in a longer and familiar story (Allern, 2008).

Moving beyond the more general question formulated earlier to the more specific research questions, this investigation focuses on the explicit and implicit arguments in the narratives: what truths on climate change are being told; how truths about climate change issues are presented (implicitly or explicitly); and how truths about climate change are grounded in some social or natural ontology. This is done through reflection on sub-questions. Who are constructed as "protagonists" and "opponents" in the negotiations at Bali? What is implicitly or explicitly constructed as the "goal"? How is the struggle to achieve the "goal" framed? What information is made more salient in order to explain this struggle? What is made invisible? Does the journalist employ the norm of balance? How are conflicting claims evaluated? How is the credibility of the sources assessed?

Television Narratives

The sample includes eight broadcasters from Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe and the USA:

teleSUR (La Nueva Televisora del Sur) (Venezuela)
South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)
India Broadcast News (IBN)
Channel 4 (the United Kingdom)
the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
Norsk rikskringkasting (NRK)
Cable News Network (CNN)
Reuters

I have placed the narratives in the television reports into four categories.

1) The drama itself is the story

CNN cuts directly to the centre of the argument, showing an angry Chinese delegate demanding an apology from the secretariat of the conference while the commentator says: "It was this blunt request that caused such drama here" (CNN, 2007). In the next scene, Yvo de Boer, the Dutch leader of the secretariat, is in distress, trying to explain that the secretariat knew nothing about parallel negotiations. He breaks down in tears and leaves the podium to a standing ovation. Next comes a short presentation, before CNN again turns up the intensity: "Then this bombshell". CNN focuses on the head of the US delegation, Paula Dobriansky: "The formulation that has been put forward, we cannot accept". There is a drawn-out "boooo" from the audience. CNN then cuts to Kevin Conrad, a delegate from Papua New Guinea, who tells the US to "get out of the way" if "you are not willing to lead". The suspense has been gradually built up, and is nearing a climax. Applause breaks out among the other participants while the camera shows smiling faces. The intensity is at its height when the head of the US delegation again addresses the conference. The CNN commentary: "Then this total change". Dobriansky: "We will go forward and join the consensus". There are again applause and happy

faces. A solution has been found and now it is time for reflection. The commentator focuses on the important role played by Papua New Guinea in finding a solution to the "high drama". Philip Clapp defends the US position while Jacqueline Cramer, Dutch environment minister, again praises Papua New Guinea for its stinging criticism of the US. The commentator adds that "many agree" before reminding us that two more years of talks lie ahead.

The dramatic structure has much in common with the classic model described by Freytag (Freytag's pyramid) (Freytag, 1890). According to Freytag, many dramas and short stories can be divided into five parts, which he calls exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and dénouement. Here, in contrast to Freytag's model, there is hardly any exposition at all. CNN cuts directly to the drama and the conflict is gradually intensified as de Boer leaves the stage and the US announces its decision not to accept the proposal. Climax (Freytag's pyramid) is reached when Papua New Guinea tells the US to "get out of the way". This marks a turning point in the narrative. The conflict then unravels as the US delegation gives up its resistance; this is the phase of falling action. A conclusion is reached in the dénouement phase and the protagonists seem to be better off than at the start of the story; there is a deal of some sort.

The BBC narrates a very similar, albeit longer, story, with room for more complexity, starting with images of smoke from cars and factories while the presenter reminds us that "this is what they have been arguing about" (BBC, 2007). The BBC lets Hillary Benn, British Environment Secretary, underline the importance of a deal: "What we have achieved … frankly seemed impossible". But there were difficult battles, according to the commentator. There is a longer exposition in this narrative, but the rising action, climax and falling action are very similar to CNN's dramatic structure. BBC's longer and more complex narrative reminds us of the Hollywood model: more intensity in the beginning; a longer exposition in which background and importance are laid out; rising action, reaching a point of no return in which one sub-conflict unfolds, before the main conflict comes to its climax. The climax is followed by reflection and discussion on what has happened.

Reuters presents us with a very similar story of increasing drama, climax and denouement, but with some significant variations from BBC and CNN ("Bali climate talks reach agreement," 2007). The story is shorter and therefore less detailed. There is, for instance, no place for Yvo de Boer and Papua New Guinea's castigation of the US. A point of no return is reached as Ban Ki Moon, the UN Secretary-General, laments the lack of progress. The climax comes when the US delegation declares "we will go forward" and the UN Secretary-General therefore takes on the role of protagonist in the narrative.

Channel 4 presents a longer exposition before turning to the drama, much as did the BBC and CNN. Kevin Conrad of Papua New Guinea again plays the main role as the drama approaches the point of no return and the climax, which is reached as the US makes its "U-turn". But as the climax is reached and the narrative comes to an end, Channel 4 asks some critical questions about the content of the final agreement; indeed, Channel 4 follows up with in-depth discussions and interviews from the studio, moving outside the dramatic structure of the classical "happy ending". Inviting experts to the studio to comment on news is of course a well-tested and much used means, in television, of broadening perspectives and deepening understanding, but it nevertheless leaves us asking why the reports *from Bali* failed to reflect on at least some of the many other possible interpretations.

2) *A happy ending makes for good television?*

There is a happy ending to the narratives of both the BBC and CNN, but an even happier one in the narrative from NRK (*Dagsrevyen*, 2007). NRK constructs a dramatic structure that follows the same lines as those of CNN and the BBC: first the presenter in the studio introduces the theme "drama until last second"; then a commentator talks of "bitter confrontation" while we see debating participants; Yvo de Boer leaves in tears; the US "cannot agree" with the proposed text; the US makes a "dramatic U-turn" and there is "relief and happiness" all round. The message is brought home by a smiling Norwegian Environment Minister, Erik Solheim, who feels "incredibly relieved and happy". The interview and commentaries are accompanied by images of applauding and smiling delegates. While Channel 4 invites guests to broaden the perspectives by bringing in new points of view, NRK chooses instead to underline the happy ending theme.

3) *We are not to blame*

The last three examples, from TeleSUR, IBN and SABC, have very similar dramatic structures to those already discussed – which is not very surprising, perhaps, since these three broadcasters depend to some degree on material bought from international agencies. But each of the three gives us the opportunity to deepen the analysis of some observations which also apply to the others in the sample. First, TeleSUR puts the narrative from Bali into context using interviews. A strong underlying assumption of "us" against "them" is constructed: "we" pay the price for "their" destruction of the natural environment. This is an amplification of the main theme in most of the narratives from Bali, where the US consistently plays the role of the opponent. The polarisation of "us" and "USA" may not be very surprising, given that TeleSur was founded by six presidents (of Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela) known for their censure of the USA, explicitly to serve the goal of establishing a "new communication order" (*Telesurtv.net*, 2008).

4) *We are winning*

IBN Live actually presents two parallel narratives from Bali, depending on CNN for pictures and analysis (*"*Accord reached in Bali climate change talks*"*, 2007; *"*Bali climate change pact: The roadmap ahead*"*, 2007). The first celebrates India as a clear "winner". The second ends by saying "the planet" is the "loser". The South African Broadcasting Corporation also focuses on the drama, but with one major difference: for the first time in this sample the South African delegation enters the stage (*"*Climate Deal Finally Struck, *"* 2007). The narrative reaches a point of no return when the South African Minister for the Environment makes his speech: *"*Science is clear, no longer a debate*"*. After that, the US decides to "join consensus". There are no references to Ban Ki Moon or Kevin Conrad.

Some Reflections on Television Reporting from Bali

Journalists at Bali were reporting under the pressure of tight deadlines, competing with

each other and other stories from other events and other locations. They had to react fast, often reporting live as events unfolded in the conference room. In addition, they had to report on complex issues often hotly debated by experts. And of course the journalists had to construct narratives compelling enough to make the audiences sit down and watch.

All in this sample chose to personalise the issues, illustrating conflicting views and interests through persons such as Yvo de Boer, Ban Ki Moon and Kevin Conrad. In this way, what happened inside the conference hall became the main story. The issue at stake was no longer climate change or the possible consequences of an agreement – it was reduced to the negotiations themselves, the struggle to reach an agreement of some sort. Making this the issue at stake had the advantage of making what journalists could observe with their own eyes at Bali relevant to the issue itself.

While the negotiations at Bali, and the subject of climate change, are enormously complex matters that could in principle lead to diverse reporting, the investigation has, first and foremost, shown many similarities in dramatic structure and framing between the broadcasters in the sample. Only a very limited number of persons are represented in these, most of which make use of the same main characters – and the main characters play similar roles in almost all the narratives. Journalists reporting for television from Bali had a very limited repertoire.

We have also seen how the narratives conform, more or less, to the same basic dramatic structure (Greimas & Ricoeur, 1989). In all the reports investigated in this study, the goal is the same: a deal to reduce the effects of climate change. The opponent is also universal: the US delegation. To succeed, the protagonist must overcome resistance by confronting the US in the debate. The representative of Papua New Guinea is an unlikely player on the international political stage, but one that reminds us of many central characters in folk tales: a small and relatively poor country standing up to the only remaining superpower.

This narrative leaves many questions unanswered, for there is no time to reflect on the content of the proposed deal or to investigate reasons for the US opposition. The narrative structure is ideally suited to construct identification with the protagonists, and thereby to engage the audience, but facts, figures and alternative perspectives are excluded to such an extent that critical thinking becomes difficult. The audience can of course seek alternative information from other sources that challenge these narratives, and there are no linear links between journalistic narratives and audience interpretations. But seen in relation to the journalistic ideals held by many journalists, it becomes more problematic. On the very first page of his textbook on journalism, Harcup says that many define the subject in the following way: "Journalism informs society about itself" (2009, p. 3). According to Harcup, individual journalists "might see themselves as satisfying their professional commitment" by taking a number of steps before publishing (2009, p. 89). In these narratives, conflicting claims are not assessed by looking at both sides, but are dealt with implicitly, within a narrative of good versus bad. The information given in the story makes it impossible to evaluate the judgments about conflicting claims made by the journalist.

The journalists respond to these problems in different ways. Many – the BBC, CNN and IBN, for instance – end their reports by suggesting possible future challenges. The BBC tells us that two more years of negotiations lie ahead, and they will be "far more difficult" than securing a deal at Bali.

Channel 4 investigates the deal further by in-depth interviews from the studio with both climate change sceptics and proponents of stronger measures. The report from Bali ends with applause after the US declaration of support for the proposed agreement, but the interviews are introduced from the studio with the words: "Does the Bali action plan deserve the applause?" While most broadcasters enrich their coverage of the deal by bringing in new perspectives from the studio, the interviews also threaten to undermine the narratives established in the reports from Bali, for while the narratives tell of success, from the studio the broadcasters seem to be warning the audience not to trust the narratives – perhaps it was not a success after all. One could argue that these studio interviews should be integral components of any such television coverage, and that they are most definitely important elements of the television coverage of events such as Bali. But why spend time and money on sending a team to Bali if the story does not stand up to closer scrutiny from the studio?

These considerations support the findings of Boykoff and Rajan (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007). The need to construct stories based on personalisation, dramatisation and novelty significantly influences the employment of critical evaluation of sources, resulting in their not fulfilling the conditions for a good discourse, especially the condition that the speaker must believe in both the premises and the conclusion of the argument. Rather, the story leaves the impression that it is constructed to create a spontaneous emotional reaction rather than to represent and evaluate the conflicting claims according to the "veritistic ideal".

The drive to find a national angle also seems to be strong, at least for those broadcasters such as NRK, SABC, IBN and TeleSUR that cater to a national or regional audience. To some extent this is within the framework of journalism professionalism since it is the job of journalists to investigate and evaluate diplomats and politicians representing the state and its peoples, and to ask whether they have done a good job in defence of national interests. Unfortunately, when journalists take a national perspective, it seems to have little to do with critical journalism. Many journalists reporting from Bali uncritically, in their own narratives, adopted national interests and meta-narratives of their nation's international role (by "meta-narrative" I mean a global narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience; cf. Stephens & McCallum, 1998). The South African delegation thus becomes the leading protagonist in the SABC's narrative while NRK puts the Norwegian efforts into perspective in follow-up reports on Norwegian investments to save the rainforest, thus amplifying the impression of a happy ending to the drama at Bali. TeleSUR constructs an imagined community ("us") of victims of climate change freed from any responsibility to act. In the narratives from IBN the inherent conflict between national and international perspectives seems unredeemable. The result is compartmentalisation; the two subjects are treated separately, as if belonging to unrelated worlds. India can thus be celebrated as a "winner" while the "planet" is the "loser" of the same agreement.

Narratives in Newspapers and Magazines

Print journalists reporting from Bali faced a different set of challenges. In most cases, their reports would be read a day or more after the closing of the conference, after many readers had already seen the reports on television, and I have therefore included a number of broadsheets

and magazines in the selection, potentially representing a broader spectrum of journalism. I had originally intended to include more newspapers and magazines from Latin America, Africa and South East Asia, but soon found out that most of them only printed stories from European or North American news agencies, which reduced their value to this investigation.

A number of prominent newspapers and magazines chose not to expend their resources on the climate talks in Bali. Neither *Time* nor *Newsweek* printed reportages from the conference in their editions dated 17 December. *The New African* did not run any story on the conference either. Nicaragua's best known newspaper, *La Prensa*, also chose not to publish reports on the agreement, at least not on the 15th, 16th, or 17th December, while the story could still be considered "news". This does not necessarily mean that these newspapers and magazines were not interested in climate change or in the international negotiations in Bali. *La Prensa,* for instance, ran a very interesting piece based on a story from the Spanish news agency EFE on how hurricanes, probably intensified by climate change, have destroyed much of the Nicaraguan forest, thus increasing Nicaraguan net emissions of CO_2 (EFE, 2007) and the most prestigious Nicaraguan magazine, *Confidencial*, printed a syndicated column on the "decisive confrontation in Bali" by Joseph Stiglitz (Stiglitz, 2007). Many magazines or newspapers had neither the resources nor the will to send their own reporters to Bali. *La Prensa* and *Confidencial* illustrate two alternative strategies often found in this sample: first, finding a local angle which allows the publication to report from home on the issues debated at the Bali conference and second, buying in-depth commentaries from internationally renowned experts. These strategies both leave most of the reporting from Bali to the television networks. Many newspapers and magazines simply relied on international news agencies for their coverage of Bali, printing stories closely resembling those discussed above.

The investigation showed that newspapers and magazines applied frames and narratives similar to those described earlier. I have nevertheless added two new categories.

5) We are doing something

Some newspapers did send reporters to Bali – for instance, *The Sunday Telegraph* of Sydney, Australia, and *The Nation* of Bangkok, Thailand. *The Nation* found "something to smile about" as the Thai delegation left Bali "quite happy with the result" (*"*Thai Delegates Find Something to Smile about,*"* 2007). *The Sunday Telegraph* was also pleased with the outcome, reporting on 16 December that "the world has agreed to a historic, Australian-brokered agreement to tackle climate change after the US made dramatic concessions …". In the report, one recognises many of the features found in the television narratives, as it includes many of the same elements: the US initially demanding more from developing nations; the "dramatic moments" as Yvo de Boer "fled the hall"; Kevin Conrad of Papua New Guinea telling the US to get "out of the way", before the latter decided to "join the consensus". While we have already seen how South Africa played a decisive role in the South African narrative, and India won in the Indian, this Australian version proposes Australia as the real protagonist behind the final compromise. The role of opponent in the narratives is played by the US, but the role of protagonist is flexible, and many journalists chose to let their national politicians take the part of hero or, at the very least, of helper.

6) Behind the scene

Some newspaper accounts of the final negotiations resemble the television narratives; this is not surprising, as newspaper journalists also have deadlines as strict as those of television journalists. But the printing process means that the reports will be read when the information may no longer be news, and this leads many journalists to seek alternatives to simply constructing their narrative on the basis of what they have seen and heard inside the conference hall, as the *Financial Times* did in its report on 15 December (*"*Bali Argues Through the Night to Draw the New Roadmap,*"* 2007). The story is clearly written by journalists present and observing the events as they unfolded but, unlike the narratives discussed above, it is almost without description of dramatic moments. The focus is not on the negotiations, but on the importance or meaning of the final agreement. We find no obvious candidate for the role of protagonist. Neither is the role of opponent clear-cut. The *Financial Times* presents a more complex reality in which many have special interests and are fighting for them. There is no single problem or conflict, but many contending views. The narrative therefore does not fit any of the presented models of dramatic structure, since there are no points of no return, no climax and hardly any rising action.

But the report does contain information that had not yet been presented by any of the other narratives in the sample. *Financial Times* for instance sheds light on the conflict between the US and some developing countries, noting that Japan and Canada sided with the US. The report also explains why developing countries so strongly refused the demands to limit CO_2 emissions. The information is edited and presented according to the criterion *importance*, not *conflict* or *sensation*, in contrast to those discussed above.

German *Der Spiegel* chose an altogether different strategy. Instead of a report from Bali, *Spiegel* published an in-depth interview with Nobuo Tanaka, Executive Director of the International Energy Agency (IEA) (Schwägerl, 2007). While this strategy leaves *Der Spiegel* without the drama, tears and confrontation of the Bali conference, it gives its readers new information and fresh perspectives, even though they have probably already seen the news from Bali on TV.

The Economist published the most interesting reports from Bali, not least because it disagreed with the underlying assumptions of most others in this sample. While many saw Bali as a success, *The Economist* saw a failure: "Sadly, the substance did not remotely match the storyline" (Economist, 2007). *The Economist* was on the streets four days after the end of the Bali conference and therefore risked serving its readers old news, but it made the discourse itself an important theme of its reporting. According to *The Economist*, the final hours of the conference might have been scripted in Hollywood, but the drama blurred the more important picture, the "glacial pace of progress towards a global agreement" while "the mercury goes on rising". According to *The Economist*, the agreement did not amount to much more than "a vapid statement of good intentions", and although proposed targets to cut carbon emissions were dropped, the negotiations would get nowhere until the present American administration made way for one "that takes climate change seriously".

Conclusion

The journalists considered here have constructed a variety of "protagonists". The most

typical is based on the representative from a "tiny" state that stood up to the "most powerful nation on earth". Other varieties place the protagonists and helpers firmly within longer, well-known national narratives on the nation and its role in the world. The constant ingredient in almost all narratives seems to be the construction of the "opponent" (with the USA universally portrayed in the role) who has to be defeated in order for the desired goal to be achieved. This goal is sometimes stated explicitly as "saving the planet", but most of the time it is only implicitly understood, as something closely related to the more visible goal of reaching a negotiated settlement at Bali. In framing the struggle for this goal, some information was made more salient, while other particulars became invisible. In all the narratives for television, it was only information about the conference and the negotiations that was reported, and none of the journalists were trying to evaluate consequences or to assess conflicting claims – which would have required additional knowledge. This seems to support Dunwoody and Peters in that the typical journalist has neither the time nor the expertise to check the validity of claims (Dunwoody & Peters, 1992). The television reports reduced the issue at stake to what Goldman described as a "reportage on who is winning" (Goldman, 1999, p. 314).

Most journalists do, to some extent, employ the norm of balance, or at least make sure that both sides are heard and seen, if not given the same amount of attention. Giving attention to both sides becomes a substitute for checking the validity of the claims, which would require context, knowledge and information from outside the conference hall. It would also require open argumentation; leaving the journalists themselves open to censure. By avoiding openly evaluating conflicting claims, the reportages make important context, knowledge and information invisible.

There are three problems with this pattern of coverage. First, the journalism is not transparent; important decisions and evaluations made by the journalist are hidden from the viewers and readers. Second, by focusing on who is winning, the communication systematically makes important information on the consequences of climate change invisible. Third, the coverage is very uniform, with most journalists selecting the same sources, employing the same narratives and framing the information in similar ways, whereas according to the total evidence principle (Goldman, 1999, p. 145) constructed knowledge based on a variety of sources is generally more reliable than knowledge based only on part of the evidence. Using a variety of sources and arguments increases the probability of reaching a conclusion in accordance with the "veritistic ideal".

In the selected reportages from Bali, most of the journalists systematically chose to construct a narrative conforming to pre-defined meta-narratives or meta-frames and genres, with implicit expectations of what "a good story" consists of, with the urge to construct a good story taking precedence over the ideal of informing society. From a critical realism perspective, this is problematic because ontology must have priority over epistemology. It seems like these journalists structured and framed the information according to historical, and thus pre-defined, notions of what the audience wanted to hear or "learn". Genres and narratives connect journalists and audience with a "tradition" (Gadamer & Palmer, 2007) which can be used to facilitate the communication of complex issues. I am certainly not suggesting that past experiences and tradition should not play an important role in communications about climate change. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any meaningful communication that is not grounded in

some common understanding of past experience and tradition. But, faced with new and future challenges, journalists cannot replace critical evaluation and analysis with the mechanical use of genres and narratives built on past experiences. In this selection of reports from Bali, the majority of journalists, faced with a very complex issue, chose to employ narratives and genres mechanically. A few, though, proved that alternative forms of journalism are possible.

This small contribution to the body of literature on journalism about climate change has pointed towards areas in need of more research. First and foremost, it indicates a need for more reflection on the ways journalists use pre-defined genres and pre-defined concepts to communicate complex information and knowledge. The key word is here "pre-defined". Genres and meta-narratives are both socially constructed based on past knowledge and experience and, typically, closely related to socially constructed notions of community and identity. Understanding climate change issues, on the other hand, requires the willingness and the ability to transcend the local perspectives and to employ different frames and categories for communication. The journalists in this study had to negotiate this tension – one between employing pre-defined genres and meta-narratives on one side and, on the other, seeking deeper understanding and the truths about climate change through transcending local perspectives. In my view, how journalists navigate between truth seeking and employing pre-defined culturally grounded genres and meta-narratives in such a context is a field in urgent need of more empirical research.

References

Aglionby, John & Harvey; Fiona. (2007, December 15). Bali argues through the night to draw the new Roadmap. *The Financial Times.* Retrieved December 7, 2008, from http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c3738082-aab0-11dc-a779-0000779fd2ac.html

Allern, Sigurd. (2008). The construction of frames in news journalism. Paper presented at *The Revolution will not be televised*, Volda.

Tears and boos inside the summit [Television]. (2007). London: BBC. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid_7140000/newsid_7145600/7145610.stm?bw=nb&mp=wm&asb=1&news=1&ms3=50&ms_javascript=true&bbcws=2

Bali climate deal. (2007, December 16). *The Sunday Telegraph.*

Bhaskar, Roy. (1979). *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press.

Bhaskar, Roy. (1989). *Reclaiming reality: A critical introduction to contemporary philosophy.* London & New York: Verso.

Boykoff, Maxwell T. (2007). Flogging a dead norm? Media coverage of anthropogenic climate change in United States and United Kingdom, 2003-2006. *Area, 4*(39), 470-481.

Boykoff, Maxwell T. (2008). The real swindle, nature reports climate change. *Nature Reports Climate Change,* Published online.

Boykoff, Maxwell T. & Boykoff, Jules M. (2004). Balance as bias: global warming and the US prestige press. *Global Environmental Change 14*, 125-136.

Boykoff, Maxwell T. & Boykoff, Jules M. (2007). Climate change and journalistic norms: A case-study of US mass-media coverage. *Geoforum*, *38* (6, November), 1190-1204.

Boykoff, Maxwell T. & Rajan, S. Ravi. (2007). Signals and noise. Mass-media coverage of climate change in the USA and the UK. *EMBO Reports 8*(3), 207-211.

Brossard, Dominique; Shanahan, James & McComas, Katherine. (2004). Are issue-cycles culturally constructed? A comparison of French and American coverage of global climate change. *Mass Communication and Society*, *7*(3), 359 - 377.

Carlile-Alkhouri, Michelle. (2007, December 15). Bali climate talks reach agreement. *Reuters*.

Retrieved August 18, 2008 from http://www.reuters.com/video/2007/12/15/bali-climate-talks-reach-agreement?videoId=72738

Carvalho, Anabela & Burgess, Jacquelin. (2005). Cultural Circuits of Climate Change in U.K. Broadsheet Newspapers, 1985-2003. *Risk Analysis, 25*(6)*, 1457 - 1469.*

Cox, J. Robert. (2007). Nature's "crisis disciplines": Does environmental communication have an ethical duty? *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, *1*(1) 5-20.

Dilling, Lisa & Moser, Susanne C. (2007). *Creating a climate for change: Communicating climate change and facilitating social change.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dunwoody, Sharon & Peters, Hans Peter. (1992). Mass media coverage of technological and environmental risks. *Public Understandings of Science*, *1*, 199-230.

EFE. (2007). Nicaragua se convierte en "alto emisor" de CO2 por huracan, afirma experto [Nicaragua turns into high producer of CO2 because of hurricanes says expert]. *La Prensa*.

Entman, Robert M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(4), 7.

Ereaut, Gill, & Segnit, Nat. (2006). *Warm words: How are we telling the climate story and can we tell it better?* Institute for Public Policy Research: Retrieved from http://www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=485

Freytag, Gustav. (1890). *Die technik des dramas* [*Drama technique*]. Leipzig: Hirzel.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg & Palmer, Richard E. (2007). *The Gadamer reader: A bouquet of the later writings*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

Gamson, William A.; Croteau, David; Hoynes, William & Sasson, Theodore. (1992). Media images and the social construction of reality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *18*, 373-393.

Gans, Herbert J. (1980). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS evening news*. NBC nightly news, Newsweek & Time. New York: Vintage Books.

Gitlin, Todd. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making & unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goffman, Erving. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Goldman, Alvin I. (1999). *Knowledge in a social world.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Goldman, Alvin I. (2009). *Goldman, Alvin.* Retrieved September 12, 2009, from http://philosophy.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=102&Itemid=210

Greimas, Algirdas Julien & Ricoeur, Paul. (1989). On narrativity. *New Literary History*, *20* (3), 551-562.

Hackett, Robert A. & Zhao, Yuezhi. (1998). *Sustaining democracy?: Journalism and the politics of objectivity.* Toronto: Garamond Press.

Hampshire, Stuart. (1999). *Justice is conflict.* London: Duckworth.

Harcup, Tony. (2009). *Journalism: Principles and practice*. (2 ed.). London: Sage.

Hulme, Mike. (2007). *Newspaper scare headlines can be counter-productive.* Nature, *445* (7130), 818-818.

Hulme, Mike. (2008). The conquering of climate: Discourses of fear and their dissolution. *Geographical Journal*, *174*(1), 5 -16.

Kline, Stephen. (1979). Creating reality: How television news distorts events. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 5*(3), 36-39

López, José & Potter, Garry (2005). *After postmodernism: An introduction to critical realism*. London: Continuum.

MacDougall, Curtis D. (1982). *Interpretative reporting.* New York: Macmillan.

McLeod, Douglas & Detenber, Benjamin H. (2006). Framing effects of television news coverage of social protest. *Journal of Communication*, *49*(3), 3-23.

Mishra, Nikita. Bali climate change pact: The roadmap ahead *IBN live.* (2007, December 16). Retrieved July 15, 2008, from http://ibnlive.in.com/news/bali-climate-change-pact-the-roadmap-ahead/54325-3.html

Mooney, Chris. (2004). Blinded by science. *Columbia Journalism Review 43*(4; Nov/Dec).

Norris, Christopher. (2005). Critical realism and quantum mechanics: Some introductory bearings. In José López & Garry Potter (Eds.). *After postmodernism: An introduction to critical realism* (pp. 100 - 116). London: Continuum.

Propp, Vladimir Yakovlevich. (1968). *Morphology of the folktale* (2nd ed.). Austin.: University of Texas Press.

Rivers, Dan. (2007, December 15). Climate change conference 'success'. *Cable News Network.* Retrieved 2008, July 22, from http://www.cnn.com/

Rivers Dan. (2007, December 16). Accord reached in Bali climate change talks. *IBN Live*, retrieved 2009, July 12 from http://ibnlive.in.com/news/accord-reached-in-bali-climate-change-talks/54296-2.html

Sampei, Yuki & Aoyagi-Usui, Midori. (2009). Mass-media coverage, its influence on public awareness of climate-change issues, and implications for Japan's national campaign to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. *Global Environmental Change*, *19* (2, May), 203-212.

Schudson, Michael. (1995). *The power of news.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Schwägerl, Christian. (2007). Sparen, sparen, sparen. *Der Spiegel*, 41.

Se aprueba Hoja de Ruta de Bali tras superar obstrucción de EEUU, *Telesur.* [A roadmap is approved at Bali after overcoming resistance from the US]. (2008, December 15). Retrieved December 7, 2008 from, http://www.telesurtv.net/secciones/noticias/buscar.php

Some like it cool. (2007, December 19). *The Economist.* The South African Broadcasting Corporation. (2007, December 16). Climate deal finally struck. *The South African Broadcasting Corporation,* Retrieved August 18, 2008, from http://www.sabc.co.za/wps/portal/SABC/SABCTV

Stephens, John & McCallum, Robyn. (1998). *Retelling Stories, framing culture: Traditional story and metanarratives in children's literature*. New York: Garland.

Stiglitz, Joseph. La confrontación decisiva en Bali [The decisive confrontation in Bali]. (2007, 16 December). *Confidencial*, 565.

Sukin, Kamol. (2007, December 15). Thai delegates find something to smile about. *The Nation*. Retrieved August 23, 2008, from http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2007/12/15/national/national_30059185.php

Torp, Ole, Kveldsnytt. (2007, December 15), NRK. Retrieved August 19, 2008, from http://www.nrk.no/nett-tv/indeks/116756/

United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC) (2007). The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali. Retrieved September 13, 2008, from http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop_13/items/4049.php

Van Gorp, Baldwin. (2007). The constructionist approach to framing: Bringing culture back. *Journal of Communication*, *57*(1), 18.

White, Ted. (1996). *Broadcast news writing, reporting, and producing*. Boston: Focal Press.