Multistoried Climate Talk:
A Narrative Analysis of International
Climate Policy

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Abstract

How does the international diplomatic community use narrative to talk about climate change? The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was created 25 years ago in recognition of the fact that climate change was a global issue that affected all countries in one way or another, and that no effective action could be taken without some level of international coordination. Today, the yearly international climate conferences (COPs) gather tens of thousands of participants representing a multitude of interests, from technological innovation to forest conservation, urban planning to indigenous people’s rights. Yet, greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, creating a growing gap between aspirations in international discussion and action on the ground. To bridge this gap, policymakers and academics alike have argued that better communication is required.

Frequently these calls for improved communication are couched in terms of an appeal to narrative. This thesis examines how the concept of narrative is used in the context of international climate policy and critically analyses the claim that using narratives can lead to better policy outcomes.

Through a study of UNFCCC activity between 2017 and 2019, and of the narrative-based Talanoa Dialogue in particular, I argue that narratives should be seen as relational devices that can foster mutual understanding across cultural divides. Building on the Narrative Policy Framework, the thesis presents an in-depth analysis of the ecology of narratives found within the COP environment. By examining narratives at the separate, though interconnected, levels of individual, organisational, institutional, and media discourse, I find that it is the selective appropriation and granularity of narrative that enables it to achieve its relational role.

Keywords: climate change policy, narrative policy framework, UNFCCC, Talanoa Dialogue
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Statement of Originality

I declare that the following work is my own and all else has been appropriately referenced following the Harvard Citation Format.

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Introduction

Chapter 5 of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* opens at the start of the nineteenth century with this remark: “A change seemed to have come over the climate of England. Rain fell frequently, but only in fitful gusts, which were no sooner over than they began again […] Thus the British Empire came into existence” (Woolf, 2014) [1928]). The novel traces three hundred years of British history through the evolution of its climate, from the frosty air of Elizabethan England to the bright metallic skies of Modern London. When it was published in 1928, the greenhouse effect had already been theorized by Joseph Fourier and experimentally confirmed by John Tyndall, but it would be another ten years before Guy Stewart Callendar’s demonstration of the correlation between temperature and atmospheric concentrations of CO₂, which eventually led to the realization that humans were inadvertently changing the Earth’s climate through their industrial activity (Hulme, 2009:45).

Eighty years later, in 2008, the United Kingdom became the first country to adopt legislation that was explicitly designed to mitigate adverse effects of man-made climate change. In 2015, 194 countries came together in Paris, each with a list of national commitments to collectively achieve a target of emissions reduction, in an unprecedented demonstration of international coordination. While the body of scientific evidence identifying causes, impacts and potential mitigation pathways keeps growing, climate change remains a contentious political topic, raising issues as varied and complex as access to natural resources, access to food, intra-national inequality, migration patterns and the historical weight of colonial industrialisation.
1. Why this thesis

This thesis looks at how narratives are used by key actors of international climate governance to push for their policy agendas. For many years, climate change was considered a fringe issue and did not make the top ten of concerns for people in developed countries (Clemence, 2020). Recent popular movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future have changed this, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change was frequently making headlines, with nations committing to bold targets like the UK’s Net Zero by 2050, for example. The Paris Agreement as it stands commits countries to limiting global warming to 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels. Yet current policies are still far below what is required to achieve this, and there is a further action gap between policy intentions and actions that have actually been taken, shown by the United Nations Environmental Programme’s Emissions Gap report published in November 2020 (UNEP, 2020) (see Figure 1). Even with the pandemic bringing many economies of the world to halt for months at a time in 2020 only led to a temporary dip in emissions, with activity starting again much like before once the first phase of global lockdown ended (see Figure 2).

This double gap, between goals and commitments, and between commitments and achievements, makes climate change policy and politics widely popular topics of academic study. The body of research on the topic has only grown in twenty years since it was recognised by most nations that climate change could be a threat to human life on earth and the trend is not receding. It has attracted interest from a range of disciplines in natural and social sciences, as well as humanities.
For the sake of this particular thesis, the focus will be on the international stage; that is, the spaces that have been created for nation states to come together peacefully to talk about, negotiate, and agree on issues in which they all have a stake. The current international stage is the result of the United Nations (UN) and Bretton-Woods institutions created at the end of World War Two. Its main orchestrator is the United Nations Secretariat that hosts a yearly meeting with all member states, and a number of affiliated organisations that conduct issue-
The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the main institution of interest within this ecology. Beyond the formal UN system, countries also interact in regional (e.g., the European Union) or bilateral forums (e.g., trade talks between the United States and China). I choose to focus on this international level, because climate change, as I will argue in further detail in Chapter 2, is a global concept that knows no geographical border: if you emit enough greenhouse gases to melt ice caps, the sea will not rise exclusively around your own coast.

Figure 2. Reduction in emissions in 2020 relative to 2019 levels due to COVID-19 lockdowns (UNEP, 2020)

The second conceptual component of this thesis is that of “narrative”. There is a growing body of literature in policy studies that examines how narratives develop, advocate for, and review policies, including climate policies. Outside of academia, policymakers and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working to close the “Emissions Gap” highlighted in Figure 1 have in recent years become interested in narratives as an innovative mode of communication to more efficiently convey their positions and build connections with different stakeholders. At the UNFCCC, narratives were given first billing in a round of consultation called the *Talanoa Dialogue* which took place through 2018.
There are as many definitions of narrative as there are scholars of narratology, and I will trace these more extensively in Chapter 1. Throughout this thesis, I will use the term narrative as a form of discourse which holds a number of identifiable characteristics that result in a text which tells a story. In fact, I will use the words narrative and story interchangeably throughout.

However, because the word narrative can have so many definitions – from a specific part of a story that serves the express purpose of advancing plot, to a very general substitute for the word “discourse”, so can the idea of “using narratives in climate policy” encompass a great many interpretations. As I argue at more length in Chapter 1, policy actors will colloquially speak of developing a “good narrative” to explain the policy steps they have taken, without giving much thought to what a narrative actually entails, let alone a good one. Similarly, in academic contexts, the all-encompassing meaning of the term can mean that narrative analysis becomes indistinguishable from more general forms of discourse analysis.

These are, in a nutshell, the two motivations behind the work I am presenting here: there is, on the one hand, a widely acknowledged gap between climate goals and climate action, for which narrative is often invoked as a potential solution; and yet, on the other hand, there is also a gap between the promises made for narrative and clarity about the nature of narrative and how it functions in different policy contexts. This situation warrants critical and in-depth examination.

2. Research questions

This in-depth examination will be framed by two distinctive, though complementary questions: the first of a descriptive nature, and the other of a more critical one. Before I can embark on a critical review of the use of narratives as a discourse, I believe it is important to draw a detailed picture of the narratives that circulate in that space. My first question is therefore: what narratives does the international diplomatic community use to talk about climate change? This leads me to examine the main components and structure of the observed narratives, as well as seek their differences and commonalities.

Once this task of reviewing and cataloguing is complete, I turn to examine how these narratives are used. This is both an observational questions and an aspirational one: how are
narratives used to advance or hinder climate negotiations, and can any strategies be adopted to use them to facilitate ambitious climate action?

The timeframe of this study is the signing of the Paris Agreement at COP21 and its first review at COP26. I use a mix of methods to capture different media across which narratives are circulated. Firstly, I conduct documentary analyses, both qualitative (close reading of key publications, and other speeches) and quantitative (using coding grids to allow for comparison of larger data sets). Secondly, I balance this documentary analysis with two rounds of interviews with UNFCCC stakeholders from a broad range of backgrounds (from career negotiators, to city mayors, and indigenous leaders) and regions (across Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia-Pacific). These two methods are further supplemented with first-hand observations of UNFCCC proceedings at COP22 and COP23, as well as a series of affiliated events in the interceding year which I attended either in person or virtually.
3. Main findings

The main finding of this thesis is a reflexive one: the fact that one cannot undertake a rigorous narrative analysis of an area of policy without first understanding what the dominant narrative that is shaping said policy is. In other words, what constitutes climate policy, what it includes and what it doesn’t, as well as how it should be studied and addressed in practice. The way in which climate change is shaped as a policy problem demarcates the range of possible solutions to apply to it. Indeed, the very fact that it is shaped as a problem implies that it requires solutions. This knowledge, that one’s work can never completely extricate itself from the meta-narrative that shapes the reality of the community one studies, will shape the work that follows.

Starting from this analytical standpoint, I will draw four findings that have implications for policy development. Firstly, and most importantly, I find that the most convincing use of narratives in policymaking, that is, a use that both sets it apart from other forms of discourse, and results in noticeable progress in the process of agreeing on policy, sees it as a relational device. Narrative, unlike other forms of discourse such as demonstrations or arguments, has the power to build a relationship between the teller and the audience: it requires the storyteller to build a world that is compelling enough for the audience to agree to be taken from their immediate surroundings to join it, and conversely for the audience to be open enough to the possibility of being swept into the story-world. A narrative only fully makes sense as a whole journey, a journey to be taken together.

The second finding is that to understand narrative in international climate policy is to recognize there is not one singular, unifying narrative that can be formulated from a deeper understanding of the space. The lack of progress in translating international agreements into observable action is not simply due to a breakdown in communication that could be solved by formulating a more effective story. Rather, the highly context-specific nature of narratives means that several co-exist to in the international climate policy space to form a complex ecology with different levels, serving different purposes. This ecology is summarised in Figure 3.
The third finding is a key insight into how policy narratives function to become compelling forms of discourse. They do so firstly by treating actors as characters, drawing on familiar archetypes that enable audiences to make cognitive “shortcuts” through which they assign qualities to certain actors they are familiar with from other stories (e.g. heroes, villains, victims). Secondly, they use selective appropriation to shed light on particular events (while leaving others in the dark), and draw causal links between them. The result is a granular picture of what has happened (for narratives looking at the past) or what could happen (for narratives looking at the future). More importantly, this building of causal links also explain why these things have (or will) happened.

The final finding results from reflecting on the implications of the previous three. I argue that is it valuable for policymakers to invest in increasing their narrative literacy – in other words, to become better storytellers, as well as better interpreters of stories presented to them. Seeing narratives as relational devices means they can call upon them when they need to build relationships and create links across apparently insurmountable cultural and political barriers. Being able to map the different narratives that float around the international climate policy
space will help policymakers refine their communications depending on the level at which they are speaking, and the purpose they wish to achieve (Finding 2). Finally, understanding the underlying mechanisms behind narratives will allow them to both tell stories that are more compelling, and to analyse more critically those by which they may be compelled themselves (Finding 3).
4. Thesis structure

To demonstrate the power of narrative as a relational device, and how policymakers can harness it by cultivating their narrative literacy, this thesis follows a funnel-like structure, delving deeper into the inner workings of international climate policy as I question different types of stories that populate the different levels of the climate policymaking ecology presented in Figure 3.

Figure 4 – Structure of the thesis

In Chapter 1, I draw on narratology, policy studies, and the growing body of work that sits at the intersection of those two areas to settle on a methodological approach that recognises the social construction of discourse while seeking structural and textual commonalities to draw generalisable conclusions on the definition of narratives and their analysis. From this understanding, it then becomes necessary in Chapter 2 to draw out what the dominant narrative is to explain how the international climate policy space has been built. This narrative construes climate change as both a scientific and cultural phenomenon, and follows a historical perspective to account for developments in the international climate regime since the 1990s. Chapter 3 starts the analysis with the outer-most layer of the policy ecology, the public-facing media coverage of UNFCCC proceedings. More precisely, it presents a narrative analysis of press articles covering President Trump’s announcement in June 2017 of the US’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in four Western countries (the US, the UK, France, and
Germany). Chapter 4 focuses on how the main actors in international climate policy use narratives to explain the process and their place in it. It is informed by a set of interviews conducted during COP23 in December 2017. Here, first conclusions are also drawn on the extent to which stakeholders use narratives with intent to push for their policy agendas. Chapters 5 and 6 form a two-part case study of what happens when these actors are explicitly asked to tell stories to further the negotiation process, using the example of the Talanoa Dialogue which took place between January and November 2018. This had both a written and an oral component. The written component is the focus of Chapter 5; a narrative analysis of the stories submitted to the UNFCCC by state and non-state actors alike in an exercise of story-gathering of an unprecedented scale within a United Nations organisation. The oral part was a series of physical dialogues held throughout 2018. In Chapter 6 I study one of these sessions. I also reflect on how participants grappled with the concept of using narratives for policy purposes through a second series of interviews. Chapter 7 gathers general reflections gleaned from these different case studies to reflect on what my findings mean both for climate policy makers and for narrative research writ-large.
Chapter 1 — Narratives and Policy-Making

In the introduction, I have mentioned that this thesis takes a narratological approach to understanding the object that is “international climate politics”. I shall do this by building on the insights of social scientists who introduced the concept of narrative to policy studies. Czarniawska (2004) broadly divides the use of narratives in social science in three categories: narrative as a basic form of human life, as a mode of knowing, and as a mode of communication. The work of this thesis falls mainly under the third category (with the corpus analyses of Chapters 3 and 5 in particular), but I cannot draw a full picture of narratives in the internal climate space without drawing on the first and second categories (when reflecting on narratives of personal identity or institutional purpose in Chapter 4, for example). Before I can embark on this empirical work, however, some theoretical considerations are required. In the first part of this chapter, I will define what I mean by ‘narrative’, trace where this concept comes from and how it has been used to study the social world, including climate policy. In the second part, I will zoom in on one of the main reasons why narratives have become such a popular focus of discussion in recent years, both in academia and in wider (Western) culture. To do this, I will examine the relationship built, whether explicit or implicit, between narratives and the power of persuasion.

1.1 Narratives

The first step is to clarify what is meant by ‘narrative’. Different authors have offered different definitions of what a narrative is. Although many narratologists distinguish narrative as representation from story as sequence of events, in the policy context this distinction is not of significance. In this thesis, I therefore take narrative and story as synonymous, both denoting a specific type of discourse whose properties I will expand on below. Ever since Thucydides’ first account of the Peloponnesian Wars, Western historians have, for the most part, constructed our understanding of the past by telling stories about events and their relations to each other. Social science, by contrast, has traditionally aimed to describe the world through the methods of science. Hypotheses are designed and tested with empirical data. From the results of these experiences, theories are formulated to explain why they were observed. Thus, Emile Durkheim, for instance, laid some of the first principles of sociology by
compiling individual accounts of people taking their own lives to derive a general understanding of how suicide was treated in French society. Such methods are called ‘positivist’ because the researcher sees themselves as a neutral observer of a ‘real’ world that exists outside of themselves. Their role is to objectively describe this world by establishing scientific facts.

The positivist tradition was challenged in the 20th century by many thinkers who rejected the idea that anyone could ever objectively describe the world. Instead, they argued, social scientists were bounded by the tools they had at their disposal: the finite amount of data they could conceivably collect, the inability to conduct ‘controlled’ experiment to test their hypotheses, and, crucially, the limited language they had at their disposal to communicate their findings. Post-positivist critiques have taken many forms, but at the centre of them all is this ontological emphasis on how the reality in which we live is bounded by the language and the socially constructed systems we have developed to make sense of the world, share this meaning with others, and bound the reality in which we live.

Thus narratives started to take a more central role within social sciences, when researchers, led by Paul Ricoeur (1991), argued for understanding narrativity not simply as a representational form but as an ontological condition of social life. This means seeing narrativity not as a property of a given academic discipline, but, as Somers (1994) explains, the way in which “we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities” (p.606). In this view, people make sense of their lives by linking individual events together, turning them into a coherent series of ‘episodes’ through what Somers calls ‘emplotment’. This is true both of personal narratives that contribute to building our sense of individual identity, as well as broader, institutional or even national narratives that build our sense of collective identity. Narrative is now used extensively in an array of disciplines, from medical humanities to linguistics, where individual retelling of events is taken as a valid object of study on a par with quantitative, more ‘scientific’, sources of data.
1.1.1 Narratology and the structuralist approach

Narrative can also be understood in a more formal sense as a specific type of discourse, different from, for example, logical statements, lists or mathematical demonstrations. In *Introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits* (1966), Roland Barthes sets out the ground rules for uncovering the universal mechanisms and properties that make up a story. He argues that there is such a thing as a narrative language which can be analysed at different levels. The text can be divided into different units serving different functions (e.g. exposition, description, action), which are articulated by a narrator, an intermediate between the author and the audience with the power to navigate these different levels of meaning. Narratology is the study of this narrative language, of all the elements that contribute to making a text a narrative.

Barthes belongs to the movement of structuralism, an intellectual movement that dominated much of the mid-20th century, with for example Chomsky (2002 [1957]) in linguistics (deep structure and universal grammar) or Lévi-Strauss in anthropology. In his study of myths, Lévi-Strauss (1955:429) asked, “On the one hand it would seem that in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen. […] But on the other hand, this apparent arbitrariness is belied by the astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions. Therefore the problem: If the content of myth is contingent [i.e. arbitrary], how are we to explain the fact that myths throughout the world are so similar?” These similarities, Strauss and other structuralists claim, are due to some inherent qualities of humans in the way in which we tell stories to make sense of the world around us. Structuralism is therefore a universalist approach. It is also a deductive approach that proposes a model (or theory) against which to compare ‘real’ texts. As Barthes explained, “placed before millions of stories, [narrative analysis] is forced to adopt a deductive procedure” (1966:2 my translation).¹

¹ New developments in computer science have recently led some scholars to claim that they finally have the processing power to uncover inductively the underlying structure of these “millions of stories” with the help of Artificial Intelligence (Moretti, 2013).
The interest in uncovering the underlying structure had already started for different types of narratives: not only with Lévi-Strauss in France, but also Campbell (2008 [1949]) in the United States and Propp (2010 [first Russian edition 1928]) in Russia. The enterprise at stake here was to create models that apply to all narratives. As Barthes saw it, there is something intrinsically human about narratives: “there has never been anywhere a people without narrative” (1966:1, my translation). These are expressed in a variety of formats (myth, legends, fables, novels, but also paintings, murals, cinema, conversation), “as if humans can confer their stories to all matter” (Ibid.).

Given their diversity, the challenge, then, is to identify what narratives have in common. Narratives can be defined according to the properties they possess. Miskimmon et al. (2014) identify three properties that make a text a narrative: action, temporality and causality. Action means that there needs to be some “process of doing”, that is, it cannot be just a static description. Temporality means that there has to be temporality to this action – a beginning, middle and end at the least. Causality means that events do not happen randomly. They need to be linked to each other to form a coherent whole. Miskimmon et al. also point out that there needs to be some subjectivity. The attribute which makes a text into a narrative, which we call narrativity, has to be a property of a text itself, and not solely an interpretation of the reader. Annals, for example, are systematic recordings of events. They describe actions which happen in time, and a reader may infer an event one year that may have happened because of another event in a previous year, but the annals themselves do not make this causality explicit (White, 1980).

Somers (1994) uses a typology of four properties: temporality, causal emplotment, relationality of parts, and selective appropriation. The first two are the same as in Miskimmon et al., and indeed are common to all narrative theories. Relationality of parts is akin to causality in the sense that events need to form a coherent whole. They are organized in time through emplotment. Whereas causality specifies that this organisation has to take place in a cause-and-effect manner (e.g. event 3 happened because event 2 happened, which happened because of event 1), relationality of parts allows for more structural flexibility (e.g. event 3
and event 2 both happened because of event 1, but they are simply correlated with one another). Finally, to build a narrative that is coherent and where events are causally linked to each other, the text in question cannot possibly account for everything that might have really happened. Thus, a plot is crafted through selective appropriation where some events are given prominence, while others are omitted entirely.

Another way of defining narratives is through the elements they contain. Van Laer et al. (2014) list three key elements: a plot, characters, and a climax or outcome. To these, Bal (2009) adds the role of the narrator. As in Somers’ framework, where selective appropriation necessarily implied that the text possessed subjectivity, the narrator is the linguistic subject (rather than a real person) who ‘chooses’ to tell certain events over others in the form of a coherent plot. This distinction between narrator and author “helps to disentangle the different voices that speak in a text to make room for the reader’s input in the relative persuasiveness of those voices” (p.18). Of course, there is an overlap between these two properties and elements: plot can be defined as an element that possesses temporality and causality.

Once we have identified a narrative, we can categorise it further according to what kind of elements it is made of. There is an extensive literature on categorising types of plots and types of characters.
Gergen and Gergen (1983) take plot in a literal sense of the shape that the series of events take within a two-dimension representation of the evaluation of human experience against time. At its most basic level, a narrative can take three forms: a progressive one (where events go from bad to good), a regressive one (where they go from good to bad) and a mixed one (where things alternate from good to bad, but end up in a similar place). More complex plots
can be derived from these linear archetypes: Gergen and Gergen, for instance, identify the Tragedy Narrative as having an early peak and then inevitable descent, or the Romantic Saga as having many fluctuations as new challenges arise (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

Others have worked on categorising plot. Campbell’s (2008) Monomyth has a cyclical structure of three basic phases: separation, initiation and return (see Figure 2.3). During his adventure, the hero leaves the realm of the known to step into the unknown (separation), where he experiences something extraordinary (initiation), from which he returns transformed to the realm of the known. Other attempts at forming exhaustive categories of story structures include Brooker’s (2004) *Seven Basic Plots* and Tobias’ (1993) *Twenty Master Plots*.

![Figure 2.3 – The Hero’s Journey (adapted from Campbell, 2008)](image)

Perhaps the most influential classification of characters comes from Karl Jung. He described a series of twelve *archetypes* as characters found in mythology that have universal symbolic meanings and reveal innate elements of the human psyche (Jung, 2014). These archetypes are divided along four axes, or orientations: ego vs social, and order vs freedom (see Figure 2.4).
Jung’s classification holds some appeal in echoing character types one finds in traditional fiction, whether myths or fairytales, but the complexity of narratives makes it hard to apply in practice, where the same character may adopt different characteristics at different times. It also does not provide much information on how different characters relate to one another.

Other classifications take a simple triadic model based on the roles of heroes, villains, and victims. For example, Karpman uses a triangle of Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim (2011 (1968)) (see Figure 2.5) to capture how their interactions create drama in fiction as well as social situations. The role that each character takes can evolve throughout the narrative as conflicted situations develop.
As we examine the properties of narratives as a form of discourse, it is worth taking a moment to reflect on the format in which a given narrative is conveyed. This will be relevant as I embark on the analysis of international climate policy narratives, as the narratives I will study will come in different forms. The Talanoa Dialogue (see chapters 5 and 6) in particular consisted of a gathering of both written and oral stories, as well as an attempt at synthesising these with mixed success, as I will argue.

Much has been written in communication studies about the role of the medium. McLuhan’s (1964) seminal book *The Medium is the Message* took a historical approach to trace the evolution of different media, from the oral form to the invention of writing, the printing press, electricity, the radio and so on. Print, for example, had an “individualising” and “specialising” effect on culture. Books gave humans the ability to store vast amounts of knowledge outside individual brains, that could then be accessed across time and space without any contact having occurred between the author and the reader. This turned knowledge acquisition into an individual activity and allowed for specialisation as more specific knowledge could more easily be built by the reader upon the existing knowledge of the author.

Ong’s (2013) reflection on “orality” vs “literacy” examines in detail how narratives differ in written societies from what he calls “primary oral cultures”, i.e. cultures that have never known writing. Some of the features he outlines include addition, aggregation, redundancy, and participation. ‘Addition’ is in opposition to subordination: written discourse develops
more complex grammar than oral discourse because the loss of immediacy between the teller and the receiver means that the meaning is more reliant on the linguistic structure of the text. ‘Aggregation’ refers to a decreased use of epithets. Where oral texts will use “the great king” or “the tall tree”, the multiplication of such qualifiers quickly becomes cumbersome in written form, and tend to be dropped so we end up with simply “the king” or “the tree”. ‘Redundancy’ refers to the heightened importance of repetition in the oral form; meaning only exists while discourse is uttered, and both the teller and the receiver lack the ability to come back to what has been said. Redundancy is used to ensure that both keep track throughout the telling process. Finally, ‘participation’ refers to the intrinsically communal experience of oral storytelling. To know is to achieve empathic identification with what is being told. Conversely, writing separates the knower from the known, and sets up conditions for an ‘objective’ distancing that is not present in purely oral cultures.

Although later media theorists acknowledge that one medium does not simply replace a previous culture, but transforms and modifies it (Stevenson, 2002) there appears to be little formal research in how exactly orality subsides in our modern, written (and digital) culture.

This is but one example of some of the differences that can be found between narratives in different media (oral vs written). I comment on this particular one here as it will become useful in later chapters, but it is generally important to keep in mind that that all discourse is inextricably linked to the medium in which it is conveyed.

1.1.3 Narrative policy theory and climate change research

Narratives have gained popularity in social sciences, attracting interest from those researchers interested in climate change. Moezzi et al. (2017) present a meta-analysis of the use of narratives in energy and climate change research. They identify three main categories: stories used as data sources, as modes of inquiry, or as ‘creative paths toward social engagement’. Researchers collecting data have looked for stories in a range of sources, from Greek and Roman literature (Neuman, 1985), to citizen science projects (Ottinger, 2017). Studies that take narratives as modes of enquiry use storytelling as a means for researchers to acquire knowledge about a topic. King et al. (2008), for example, explore the role of storytelling in the transmission of Māori knowledge of weather and climate change in Aotearoa-New Zealand.
Finally, studies that use narratives as ‘creative paths’ are concerned with creating new narratives based on evidence they have gathered. These can be stories of the past (as with a re-imagining of peak oil in Pargman et al. (2017), of the future (as the comparative analysis of scientific future scenarios and literary fiction in Nikoleris et al., 2017), or of the present (as with Smith et al.’s (2014) anthology of climate stories), to name but a few. In the present thesis, I will be using narratives as sources of data in Chapter 3, 5, and 6, as well as a mode of inquiry in Chapter 4, where I explicitly invite interviewees to tell a story.

To account for this diversity of studies that fall under the “climate narrative” umbrella, it is helpful to trace more precisely the introduction of narrative theory into the wider field of policy studies before considering climate policy specifically. For this I will focus mainly on the contributions of four authors: Frank Fischer, Maarten Hajer, Deborah Stone and Emery Roe. These authors share an ontological belief that the elements of reality that scholarship focuses on are socially constructed. Fischer and Hajer focus on the stories that are mobilised by actors to support or reject a particular policy agenda, while Stone and Roe develop narrative typologies for analysts to draw on to make sense of policy actions. Following Moezzi et al.’s (2017) nomenclature, the first approach can be used to analyse stories as data sources, while the second can also apply to the use of narratives as modes of enquiry. I will finally present Michael Jones and Mark McBeth’s Narrative Policy Framework which bridges the methodological gap between structuralist narratology and post-structuralist readings of public policy.

Fischer argued for a ‘narrative paradigm’ under which, he said, “all communication should be viewed as historical and situational, stories competing with other stories” (Fisher, 1984:2). In this paradigm, some narratives are seen to be ‘rational’, or designed to convey a sense of truth, if they possess narrative probability (the narrative is coherent and seems likely) and narrative fidelity (the narrative rings true to what the audience knows in their life to be true). However, by arguing that all communication takes place in the form of stories, Fischer seems to conflate narrative with a Foucauldian form of ‘discourse’ understood as a common language shared by a social system. As such, this view does not therefore argue for a particular method of investigation. Hajer is interested in discourse as “an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena” and how they frame certain
aspects of a situation over others (Hajer, 1993:45). This is similar to Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith’s Advocacy Coalition Framework (see Chapter 2) in the sense that he looks at how discourse coalitions seek to validate their position through the institutionalisation of a particular narrative: political change occurs when a new discourse becomes dominant.

By contrast, Stone (1989) focuses on a specific type of narrative to contextualise the shaping of policy agendas, which she calls “causal stories”. She identifies four types of causal stories which analysts can draw on to make sense of policy action. A Mechanical Cause story, where unguided actions lead to intended consequences. An Accidental story, where unguided actions lead to unintended consequences. An Intentional story where purposeful actions lead to intended consequences, and an Inadvertent story where purposeful actions lead to unintended consequences. This framework is useful in the way in which it makes a difference between stories that are developed with a specific aim in mind and those which emerge organically from unfolding events, an idea I will return to when discussing strategic narratives. Roe (1994) takes a very dialectic approach to studying what he calls “policy controversies”. He devises a four-step Narrative Policy Analysis method. “Dominant” policy narratives are identified, then contrasted to “alternative” narratives. From this tension a “grand policy metanarrative” is derived. Finally, he argues that this new metanarrative “recasts the policy problem to make it more amenable to conventional policy-analytical tools”, like microeconomics or law (Roe, 1994:155).

These four approaches, while defending an ontological belief in the centrality of narratives as unique instruments of human communication, offer little guidance on what they actually consider to be narrative. This makes them all rather difficult to distinguish from more general discourse analysis. I side with Jones and McBeth (2010) in considering this a methodological weakness, which is why I shall now turn in more detail to their attempt at introducing the structuralist approach of narratology into policy studies.

1.4 The Narrative Policy Framework

The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) draws on the archetypal categorisation of stories I presented earlier to build a framework that combines social ontology and objective epistemology, taking an instrumental approach to narrative analysis through careful
demarcation of what can be studied and how. Jones et al. (2014) argue that it is possible to ascribe to a view of the world as a social construct and still seek to analyse it with objective tools (as long as the analysis is carefully contextualised). They propose to analyse policy narratives on the basis of four characteristics: the setting, or context; the plot (as decline, progress or a stable state in which “change is an illusion”); characters (divided along the categories of heroes/allies, villains/enemies and victims); and the moral of the story (the policy solution). If these four characteristics are present in a policy debate, it is said to possess narrativity. While the three elements echo the classical narratology theories presented above, Jones and McBeth include the moral of the story as an additional criterion, a way of identifying those stories that are designed to be persuasive and have a clear message about what policy action should be taken.

As in the Advocacy Coalition Framework, these narratives are seen as anchored within pre-existing belief systems, which the authors define either as ideology (for example in the US context, along partisan lines of Democrats vs Republicans) or using Cultural Theory, which divides belief systems into the four categories of Fatalist, Hierarch [sic], Individualist or Egalitarian (Thompson et al., 1990).

The NPF has been applied to policy issues which are mostly American, with some studies applying it to European policy (in the UK, Sweden and the EU), and two looking at issues in Africa (ECOWAS and Nigeria). Such studies are broadly divided into two levels of analysis: a ‘meso’ level and a ‘micro’ level (Jones and McBeth (2010) also theorize a third ‘macro’ level to analyse narratives used to organize a social system, but this level has yet to be applied in the literature). The meso level focuses on the elements of narratives that social groups (or more formally, policy coalitions) utilise to defend a given policy solution. Drawing heavily from the ACF, these narrative coalitions are identified around a particular policy issue, such as the development of off-shore wind (Shanahan et al., 2013) or gun control (Merry, 2016; Smith-Walter et al., 2016). A content analysis of the coalitions’ communication materials (sometimes extending to the press) is then conducted, seeking to identify narrative elements (characters, plot, etc.) and the impacts that they have on policy outcomes (see also McBeth et al., 2010, 2012). The micro level looks at how individuals respond to different narratives. This level draws much more on the literature of public perception and cognitive science. The
methodology entails testing different narratives via surveys in terms of their effectiveness at convincing people that a given policy option is preferable (Clemons et al., 2012; Ertas, 2015; Jones, 2014a, 2014b; Jones and Song, 2014; Lybecker et al., 2016, 2013; Shanahan et al., 2011).

Environmental issues are a frequent topic of study for the NPF, from the classification of floodplains in Montana (Elizabeth A Shanahan et al., 2018) to the relationship between renewable energy and disaster risk reduction in West Africa (Titilayo, 2018). Fløttum and Øyvind (2017) use an approach close to the NPF to study United Nations and IPCC reports, as well as Green and White papers from South Africa and Norway. Their analysis of characters and plot structure highlights how controversial statements can be concealed through the “condensation of narrative components into short expressions” (p.1).

Three related studies have looked at perceptions of climate change policy. In the first, Jones (2014b) asks whether reading narratives about climate change policy options is more persuasive than “just the facts”. He does so by conducting a survey that asks participants about their reading experience (e.g. by asking whether: “While reading the article, activity going on in the room around [them] was on [their] mind”). Overall, however, Jones does not find conclusive evidence for narratives being more “transportive” than a list of facts with regards to persuading participants to accept a specific climate policy option. However, readers who feel more transported by a story also have more positive feelings towards the hero. This prompts his second study (Jones, 2014a), which finds that respondents draw more emotional conclusions about a group when it is presented as a villain or a hero. Jones and Song (2014) further divide these heroes to assess whether people respond better to different kinds of heroes, and in particular, whether they are more persuaded by a narrative if its hero embodies values dear to the reader according to the Cultural Theory framework. The theory that narratives’ ability to transport the reader into another world causes them to be more persuasive than other forms of texts is what I turn to next.
1.2 Narratives and Persuasion

As I have mentioned, the NPF is interested in a specific type of narrative: one that is designed to persuade: it is concerned with policy narratives that identify a problem, present possible policy solutions, and endorse a particular one as preferable. This type of narrative is also considered in the international relations literature under the name “strategic narrative” (De Graaf et al., 2015; Freedman, 2006; Halverson et al., 2011; Simpson, 2012). Miskimmon et al. (2014) explain that the role of strategic narratives is to “give narrativity to events as they unfold within the constraints of prevailing domestic and international understandings and expectations” (p.8).

As the idea of narrative as a fundamental tool for exchanging knowledge and building meaning has seeped into both academia and popular consciousness, it appears that a further step has occurred, and a crucial one. Behind the concept of “strategic narrative”, or policy narrative in the instrumentalist sense implied by the NPF, is the notion that, as a vehicle for knowledge, narratives somehow hold persuasive properties that set them apart from other forms of discourse. Though seldom explicitly stated, for many it is these properties that make narratives worth studying, in the hope of mastering them in order to effectively change people’s minds.

This link therefore deserves further examination, which I will now embark on. First, it is useful to get an overview of the dominant thinking in the field of persuasion, from Aristotelian rhetoric to the psychology of decision-making.

1.2.1 Classical Rhetoric

For many years the field of persuasion was built on the classical tradition inherited from Greek philosophers, and in particular Aristotle’s Rhetoric (1984). His system was based on the triad of logos, pathos and ethos. An orator can persuade their audience through ethos by appeal to their authority or credibility. For example, celebrity scientists, such as Brian Cox or Neil deGrasse Tyson, have strong ethos when talking on scientific matters, because they are both respected as experts and trustworthy as familiar public figures. Pathos appeals to the
audience’s emotions. The sight of a small island ravaged by a tsunami may spur people into action more than dry talks of complicated statistical models. Used artfully, however, statistics can also be used to persuade people by appealing to *logos*, that is, people’s ability to think logically. Though first theorized in the 4th century BCE, this understanding of persuasion still has considerable influence today. It is still routinely taught in ethics, communication studies and marketing courses. To name but one example, Simpson (2012) uses this framework in his discussion of how narratives can be deployed for strategic purposes in military contexts.

1.2.2 The Dual Route Transportation model

The dominant model in modern persuasion scholarship is called the dual process theory. It essentially posits that when we are faced with a decision, the information can take one of two paths. The leading scholar in the psychology of decision making, Daniel Kahneman (2011), calls these two paths ‘System 1’ and ‘System 2’. System 1 consists of autonomous and effortless intuitive processes. These operate without controlled attention and generate quick, automatic responses in such a way that it is impossible to trace the steps we took to that conclusion. Such intuitive processes are essential to our survival and indeed help us in our day-to-day life, such as jumping out of the way when we hear a car approaching. Creative thoughts and ideas also come through System 1. System 2 is a reflective form of reasoning that is conscious, deliberative and requires controlled attention. It is the system that draws on our ability for abstract thinking, mental simulation and introspection and can be applied to many different problem domains, from mathematics to choosing what to have for dinner (Rapley et al., 2014). The metaphor of the elephant (intuitions) and the rider (reasoning) has been used by Jonathan Haidt (2012) to illustrate these concepts. An elephant rider may think that they are in charge of where they are leading their animal, but in practice elephants have a mind of their own and the direction they end up taking is much more of a negotiation between elephant and rider. Likewise, people tend to overestimate the influence of the reasoning “driver” in their mind, because this thinking process happens consciously, when much of the elephant’s intuitive thinking happens unconsciously.²

² See also (Evans and Stanovich, 2013; Haidt, 2001; Sherman et al., 2014).
One of Kahneman and Tversky’s most famous experiments is the Linda problem. Participants are presented with the following question:

*Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken, and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations.*

Which is more probable?

1. Linda is a bank teller.
2. Linda is a bank teller and is active in the feminist movement.

(Tversky and Kahneman, 1983)

The experiment has been repeated many times over the years to different audiences, and people overwhelmingly answer (2). This is false of course. Proposition (1) ‘Linda is a bank teller’ is included in Proposition (2). Therefore, if (2) is true, (1) is necessarily true, but the opposite doesn’t apply. But the description of Linda is more consistent with someone being part of the feminist movement than a bank teller, hence our tendency to feel that (2) is a statement that is more right than (1). The Linda problem is one of many devised by Tversky and Kahneman that led them to conclude that it was very difficult for people to think statistically, because our System 1 is trained to think causally. The coherence between the description and Proposition (2) above is more important to us instinctively than the statistical fact that (2) cannot be true unless (1) is true also. Though Kahneman does not refer to narratives explicitly in his work, this causal way of thinking is very strongly reminiscent of Somers’ (1994) definition of narrative as selective appropriation.

1.2.3 Narrative transportation

Inspired by these insights from psychology, authors have attempted to pin down what, if anything, makes narratives an effective form of persuasion. The Narrative Transportation model, originally developed by Green and Brock (2000), describes a “convergent process,
where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative” (Ibid., 701). This process tries to capture a qualitative immersion, rather than a quantitative, measurable “amount of thought”. Though originally developed to describe a reader’s experiences when faced with a work of fiction, Van Laer et al. (2014) extended it to apply to all texts that have a narrative structure in order to explain why policy narratives may be more effective tools of persuasion than other types of discourse. “Transported readers,” the argument goes, “may be less likely to disbelieve or counterargue story claims, and thus their beliefs may be influenced” (p.702). They test this theory through a series of experiences where different groups of people are asked to read different narratives and answer questions about whether their beliefs on a particular subject have changed after reading the story (real or fictional). They find that narrative transportation is associated with story-consistent beliefs (i.e. one is more likely to be ‘transported’ by a story that exhibits beliefs we agree with) but are inconclusive on whether transportation actually influences belief.

While Green and Brock’s original paper only provided an explanation for how persuasion might occur in a narrative text, it has curiously since been taken as evidence that narratives are inherently persuasive (Banerjee and Greene, 2012; Escalas, 2007; Van Laer et al., 2014), which is misleading. Indeed, comparative studies of narrative vs argumentative/rational/statistical forms of persuasion find mixed results. Slater and Rouner (1996) find that statistics are more persuasive, Allen and Preiss (1997) find use of statistical evidence slightly more persuasive than narratives (by comparing over 16 papers written in the field of communication science), while Dunlop et al. (2010) find on public health issues that there is no great difference. The divergence in these findings point once again at the importance of audience and context when assessing the persuasive power of discourse.

Given the limited empirical evidence for narrative transportation alone as a factor of strategic effectiveness, the NPF proposes that three other factors may be at play: congruence (the extent to which the narrative fits within the audience’s belief system), canonicity (the extent to which the narrative is well established), and the level of trust and credibility attributed to the narrator. While there have been attempts at assessing the congruence factor using existing frameworks like Cultural Theory (as described above), there is no such literature
assessing the other two factors. These will nevertheless be recurring features of my discussion of policy narrative, as I turn to look into how climate narratives spread.

**Conclusion**

This chapter traced how narratives have entered the social sciences both as an object and method of study. This raised both ontological considerations (narratives as constituents of reality) and epistemological considerations (narratives as methods for acquiring and transmitting knowledge about reality). For example, American Republicanism is based on the belief that the United States is the ‘home of the brave, land of the free’, where men regularly fight valiantly to preserve the freedom of their community, both at home and abroad. They know this because of the stories they tell of the struggle for independence from the British and how their Founding Fathers enshrined their fundamental rights into their Constitution.

I also pointed to some of the challenges a researcher is then faced with once the ontological nature of narratives has been established, as the literature offers little guidance of how to go about uncovering meaning from narratives. It is the eternal problem of post-positivism: how to reconcile the relativity that the ontological consideration implies, with a commonly agreed sense of reality? The approach I find most convincing is the one that acknowledges that there is such a thing as truth that can be collectively agreed upon, lest society would not function. If we take discourse as the ensemble of utterances produced to achieve various definitions of this truth, narratives can be seen as a subset of discourse, with identifiable properties that distinguish it from other forms, from which one can access said truth. Making narrative a subset of discourse, rather than its substitute then allows us to define its properties and how to analyse them. It is such a hybrid approach that the Narrative Policy Framework takes, a compromise between social ontology and objective epistemology, and it is this hybrid approach that I will follow. This is the theoretical framework within which the rest of this thesis will operate. I will draw from other contributions to social sciences when the topic I focus on calls for it as well: for example in Chapter 6 I will be looking at oral narratives, and invoke Ong’s (2013 [1982]) conceptualisation of orality. In Chapter 4, I will draw on de Graaf et al.’s(2015) reflexions on strategic narratives to make a distinction between narratives related by climate negotiators to make sense of their own work, and those they use to communicate their work with others, to cite but two examples.
But first I will examine in detail the “master” narrative that has shaped how the international climate change space functions today. As I indeed mentioned, adopting a “bounded” post-positivist position means that one acknowledges that social groups share a commonly agreed vision of what constitutes truth. This truth defines the rules and informs of the behaviour of those who exist within it, and it is therefore crucial to understand both how it exists today, and how it came to be.
Chapter 2 — Climate, Culture, and International Policy

The difference between weather and climate is often explained like this: “climate is what you expect, and weather is what you get”. This describes climate as a meteorological phenomenon (made up of several factors such as temperature, precipitation or cloud formation) that are stable enough over time for us to be able to make predictions. We can think of Mediterranean, Continental or Oceanic climates, which all refer to the kind of weather certain regions get, and how that affects the flora and fauna that live there. It also, of course, influences the humans who live there. In everyday life, we speak of the political or economic climate to describe the collective mood of a society (and so do speakers of many other languages such as French, Chinese and Russian). As geographer David Livingstone (2004:74) argues, “whilst ordinarily thought of as simply a constituent element of the natural order, climate has consistently surfaced as a cultural category.”

In what follows, I will present how climate change first came to be as an object of scientific study, and how it progressively transformed towards an object of policy-making, subject to a variety of cultural interpretations. This move, from “scientific” to “social” and “political” constitutes what I will be calling the “master narrative” of climate change policy, the shared understanding upon which dominant culture of climate change policy has been built.

I will do so in two stages: first, by presenting the historical account of the “discovery” of climate change as a scientific, natural phenomenon, and the progressive building of evidence that attributes the current wave of climate change to human activity — anthropogenic component. From there, I give an account of the most influential ways in which it has been studied as a cultural object.

But it is also important to note that when we talk about climate change today, we are talking about the global climate: how the Earth system, globally, changes over time. The second part of this chapter therefore traces how this master narrative has influenced the development of climate policies at the international level since the 1990s, zooming in on the post-2015 period and the architecture of the Paris Agreement. It also introduces some of the main theories in the field of international relations and public policy that have been used to explain this development.
2.1 Climate Change Science and Culture

Climate change science is both complex and uncertain: it deals with long time periods (using data going back thousands of years), and large systems (from local weather observations to global fluctuations). Projecting how this system will behave in the future necessarily encompasses uncertainty: it is an exercise in defining alternate possible scenarios with different levels of likelihood. In this chapter, I will argue that this complexity has maintained the close relationship that has developed between climate change science and policy. Walsh (2013) speaks of the “prophetic” role of climate scientists to describe this mutual shaping of climate science and policy, with the development of Integrated Assessment Models designed to predict future impacts of climate change acting as “divination technologies” to orient policymaking (p.182).

2.1.1 Climate change science(s)

The scientific discovery of anthropogenic climate change happened in several stages. The first stage was the discovery of the greenhouse effect, that is, the fact that radiation from the sun is absorbed by certain gases in the atmosphere and warms the planet more than if there were no atmosphere. On Earth, several gases are responsible for the greenhouse effect: water vapour, carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), ozone (O₃), nitrous oxide (NOₓ), and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) (Rutledge et al., 2011). A second, more diffuse stage, was the development of systematic measurement of meteorological variables (temperature, precipitation, atmospheric pressure), as well as gas concentration in the atmosphere, around the world from the mid-19th century. By the 1960s, enough data had been gathered for scientists to begin creating computer models of the global climate. These models do not just count how much greenhouse gas there is in the atmosphere; they account for complex interactions between the biosphere (plants and animals), geosphere (the solid parts of the Earth), hydrosphere (the liquid parts of the Earth) and the atmosphere (the air). They also need to take into account disruptive events that might cause abrupt climate change, such as a destabilisation of the Gulf Stream.

By 1988 there was enough concern in the scientific community for scientific elites to successfully make a case for international organisations to formally create a body dedicated to it (Hart and Victor, 1993). Thus the United Nations and the World Meteorological
Organisation created the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC). It had the mandate to assess scientific information relevant to human-induced climate change. Over the past two decades, the IPCC has been increasingly assertive in its public statements about the magnitude and causes of climate change. In its most recent assessment report, the IPCC stated that “warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia” (IPCC, 2013:4). The human influence on the climate system, the report said, was clear: “This is evident from the increasing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, positive radiative forcing, observed warming, and understanding of the climate system” (Ibid, 17).

The realm of climate change science covers a broad span of disciplines as scientists attempt to capture in ever more detail the complex dynamics of natural processes and human activity, as reflected by the range of backgrounds from IPCC contributing authors. A study by Holm and Winiwarter (2017), looking into the backgrounds of the IPCC Working Group 3’s contributing authors (which focuses on mitigation, i.e. how to reduce the human contribution to climate change), listed thirty-six individual disciplines across natural and social sciences. On the natural sciences side, beyond pure climatology, the expertise of agronomists, oceanographers and engineers are called upon to understand emission patterns from agriculture, fluctuations in the acidity of oceans as a result of an increased absorption of carbon by the water, or what technological innovation can be deployed to reduce emissions. On the social sciences side, economists, demographers, or urbanists are needed to provide scenarios of how societies may evolve in the short and long term, but so are psychologists and philosophers to understand the impact of climate change on both individual humans and communities.

2.1.2 Climate change culture

The call on social sciences to contribute to the assessment of climate change speaks to the understanding by the international scientific community that climate change is a cultural object as much as it is a scientific one. A growing body of literature has been dedicated to tracing its cultural impact. This constitutes a crucial part of the dominant narrative that shapes how the international community understands climate change as a problem to be addressed, and defines the field of which policies are deemed appropriate to address it. It is therefore
crucial to keep this literature in mind when approaching the narratives I will encounter in future chapters.

I present the two strands of literature here. The first draws observations from secondary sources, most prominently media representations. The second draws observations from primary surveys asking individuals directly what their views on climate change are.

A common way of studying cultural perceptions of climate change is to look at how it is talked about and presented in the media. The simplest studies record over time when and where climate change is mentioned. For instance, the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) has been tracking mentions of climate change from fifty-two media sources in twenty-eight countries since 2000 (Boykoff, 2011).

One method often employed is that of framing analysis. As Entman (1993:53) defined it, a frame serves to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” Framing studies are conducted by identifying the themes, metaphors and visual imagery used in a given text to present the issue at hand. For example, Painter (2013) looks at press coverage of the release of the IPCC’s fourth assessment report (AR4) in six countries (Australia, France, India, Norway, the UK and the USA) and identifies four frames: Disaster or Implicit Risk, which presents adverse impacts of climate change; Uncertainty, which presents the range of projections and debates going on between climate scientists and sceptics; Opportunity, which focuses on the beneficial impacts of mitigating climate change early; and Explicit Risk, which directly links causes of climate change with adverse consequences. Other studies have focused on local coverage. For instance, Grundmann and Krishnamurthy (2010) used a linguistics-based approach to draw out how climate change media coverage was framed by the main climate policies of a country in a comparative analysis of press articles in the UK, the US, France, and Germany (updated in Grundmann, 2021). Along a similar line, Asayama and Ishii (2012), looking at the case of Japan, highlight the way in which the local press works on “domesticating” the global issue of climate change to make it relatable for their audience.
Several studies identified a turning point in 2018 in how the media framed climate change, centred around the release of the IPCC’s Special Report on 1.5°C (SR15, see Appendix for timeline of significant events in international climate policy). The MeCCO noted a small, but lasting rise in coverage around the time of publication of SR15, as had been the case for previous “big” events in climate policy, like the failed Copenhagen negotiations in 2009 and the successful Paris Agreement in 2015. In contrast to these two events, however, where short intense spikes were observed during the events, with a drop straight after, the coverage post-SR15 seemed to be on a steady upward trend in the years that followed. This suggests an increasing importance of climate change in the public mind (see Figure 1.1, Nacu-Schmidt et al., 2020). The MeCCO also reported a change in framing, with the emergence of the concept of a 12-year “deadline”, building on the Disaster frame outlined above (Boykoff and Pearman, 2019).

![Figure 1.1 – 2004-2019 World Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming (Nacu-Schmidt et al., 2020)](image)

Up until that point, it had been argued that communication about the impact of climate change had often been underplayed in the media, paradoxically undermined by the journalistic core value of impartiality. The traditional way of ensuring impartiality in journalistic terms is to present a debate between two sides. In consequence, even though according to the IPCC 97% of climate scientists agree that the planet is warming and that this warming is caused by human activity, television news programmes have often presented their treatments of climate change in the form of a debate between experts, underplaying the level
of scientific certainty (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004). This journalistic treatment exemplifies the way in which climate change cannot be simply understood as a scientific problem: scientists rarely get invited on television shows to debate whether gravity or cancer are real. The debate is cultural and political, resonating with people’s values and beliefs about things as varied as their place in nature or their faith in technological progress.

It should be noted that there has been a growing awareness of this limitation in the media, coupled with an understanding that the social nature of climate change means that the very language used to describe it can significantly affect the meaning. This has led a number of media outlets to revise and make public their policy for covering climate change-related news in the past couple of years. To give but one example, the editors of The Guardian, the UK-based quality newspaper with online versions also covering the United States and Australia, published a new style guide in May 2019 that included six language changes in their reporting (Zeldin-O’Neill, 2019):

1. Using ‘climate crisis’ or ‘climate emergency’ instead of ‘climate change’.

The Guardian’s new policy followed the creation of the Covering Climate Now campaign in April 2019, which pools resources and guidance on reporting climate issues for its 400-member news organisations around the world (Columbia Journalism Review et al., 2019).

Keeping track of media representations of climate change is a useful measure of public opinion (Boykoff, 2007). But, as Dunwoody (2007) points out, the media have been shown to influence decision makers as well, at least in liberal democracies. This is partly because elected representatives who wish to represent their constituents fairly need to be aware of what is being said in the public sphere. But it is also, more mundanely, because decision makers do constitute part of the ‘general public’ for any topics on which they are not experts themselves.
(as is often the case with climate change). An extreme example of that is the fact that President Trump reportedly gets his news by watching *Fox and Friends*, Fox News’ morning entertainment program (Gabbatt, 2017). Thus the media play a role in agenda setting; that is, the process by which a given topic becomes a problem that needs to be solved by political measures.

If media plays a role in agenda setting (or in Cohen’s (1963) words, in “telling people what to think about”), then it is interesting to look at which media are read or watched by different audiences, and whether the information that they consume about climate change is different: in other words, to conduct audience segmentations. In the USA and the UK, this segmentation is well documented (Boykoff, 2011; O’Neill et al., 2015; Painter et al., 2016). Kahan’s (2018) work with the Cultural Cognition Project goes one step further beyond segmentation along political lines or values, to show the self-reinforcing effect that pre-existing beliefs have on reading information on “polarising” topics like climate change. In a series of studies, he demonstrates that people are not only more likely to believe information coming from sources they trust, but that when the topic is known to the reader to be controversial, they will be more likely to disregard evidence that does not match their belief regardless of the source.

Another way of segmenting audiences is to look at different types of media outlets. Painter et al. (2016), for example, distinguishes digitally native media sources (such as *Buzzfeed*, *The Huffington Post* and *Vice*) from ‘legacy’ media (such as *The Guardian*, *The Times* or the BBC). They find that these new outlets cover climate change in different ways in terms of content as well as format. On content, they tend to focus more on opportunities and struggle, with the theme of climate justice being prevalent. On format, these digital media tend to be more visual, as well as more personal. They point in particular to *Vice*’s immersive brand of journalism. For example during the twenty-first Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC in Paris in 2015 (COP21), *Vice*’s journalists reported on hand-held devices from the inside of the environmental protests gathering around the conference, in contrast with the majority of legacy media which focused on transcribing the results of official proceedings they had obtained via press releases. Boykoff (2020) speaks of the ‘here and now’ nature of digital media, and how it has contributed during the last few years in shifting climate change as an issue of the future, to an issue of the present.
Media analyses such as these are useful indicators of the way discourse is shaped in the public space. They should not, however, be taken as proxies for analyses of public opinion; looking at the media output alone only gives a partial view of how this output is read and interpreted by its actual audience.

We can also look at cultural perceptions more directly by asking people what they actually think about climate change. The simplest way to do so is through longitudinal opinion surveys.³ For example, since 2012 the UK’s Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS, formerly DECC) has been running a regular survey of public attitudes towards climate change. The latest of these at the time of writing found that 74% of British respondents reported being concerned about climate change in April 2018 (BEIS, 2018).

In contrast to longitudinal surveys, cross-sectional surveys are used to understand how different cultural groups react to the same issues. The European Perceptions of Climate Change and Energy Preferences (EPCC) project does just that, by comparing citizens’ perceptions of climate change in the UK, France, Germany and Norway. It found, for example, that across those four countries, starting conversations about climate change by discussing adaptation policies and using the language of preparedness and resilience made people more receptive to different policy options. It also found, however, that respondents in different countries exhibited different levels of emotions (‘outrage’ in France and Germany, versus equal measures of hope and fear in the UK and low emotional response overall in Norway; see Arnold et al., 2016).

Rather than comparing groups based on a priori distinctions (such as nationality in EPCC), it is also interesting to build novel segmentations of a given population by teasing out the social, political and cultural commonalities of groups who hold similar views regarding climate change. The Yale Program for Climate Change Communication (YPCCC) conducts a regular survey of the American public on climate change perception. They have identified ‘Six Americas’: Alarmed (31%), Concerned (26%), Cautious (16%), Disengaged (7%), Doubtful (10%), and Dismissive (10%) (Goldberg et al., 2020, figures from January 2020). This segmentation enables the YPCCC to easily track the evolution of public opinion over time, and to match the different segments against other variables. The YPCCC have thus conducted

³ That is, asking the same set of questions at regular intervals over a long period of time.
follow-up surveys that include questions on knowledge of climate science (Leiserowitz and Smith, 2010), perception of health consequences (Roser-Renouf et al., 2014), as well as faith, moral and environmental beliefs (Roser-Renouf et al., 2016).

These surveys have successfully tracked the growing concern for climate change in Western countries in the past few years. Goldberg et al. (2020) found that the “Alarmed” had become the largest segment for the first time in 2019 (See Figure 1.2). It is also becoming a voting issue in the US; in November 2019, “Global warming” was ranked as the 11th most highly ranked issue affecting voters’ choice, with 68% of registered voters deeming it as “very important” or “moderately important” (Leiserowitz et al., 2020). By comparison, in the 2016 election, only 51% of registered voters deemed it to be an important issue. In the UK, Steentjes et al. (2020) found that in October 2019, climate change was the second most important response cited after Brexit when asked what was the most important issue in the next 20 years. This was also a stark increase from the 13th place it had ranked in 2016. It is likely that these ranking will be affected by the on-going COVID-19 crisis, though at the time of writing the situation is still evolving and its lasting consequences are hard to predict.
These surveys tend to have breadth but little depth. They are useful for tracking simple metrics over time, but their superficiality makes it difficult to query the results retro-actively. A contrasting approach is to interview fewer people, but in more depth, either individually or as part of focus groups. For instance, Climate Outreach (formerly COIN) has been conducting such focus groups on climate change perception in the UK for fifteen years. It has, for example, carried out a series of public conversations about climate change in Scotland. The goal of these conversation workshops is not to get a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer on whether people think climate change is real, or whether they support renewable energy policies. Rather, the seventy-minute workshops engage members of the Scottish public in paired and plenary conversations (with an average of 10-15 participants per workshop). It is a dialogical and participatory
method designed to contextualize people’s understanding and attitude towards the issue (Shaw et al., 2016). For example, the participants of the Scottish workshop did not express a strong interest in talking about the effects of climate change such as sea-level rise or heatwaves, but became more engaged when discussing the introduction of wind farms in their communities, showing a preference for local issues and positive solutions.

2.1.3 Climate change’s cultural ‘plasticity’

In the previous section, I’ve shown how different groups have been categorised according to how they perceive climate change, from the (once very visible, but now increasingly marginal) ‘sceptics’ or ‘deniers’ who staunchly maintain anthropogenic climate change to be a fabrication, to advocates who see it as the most pressing issue facing humanity, and a large portion of people in between who appear to have basic knowledge and are concerned, but do not necessarily engage actively on the topic. There have been deliberate attempts at choosing specific language in media organisations to convey specific messages that accurately convey complex scientific information, showing an awareness of how this information can be misunderstood, at best, and misconstrued, at worst.

I have also mentioned that there is an awareness in the climate change community that science is but one of the lenses through which climate change is understood today, and there have been repeated calls to understand the other lenses through which we see it better (see for example Grundmann, 2016). Mike Hulme’s book Why we disagree about climate change (2009) has been an influential landmark in offering a historical reading of the social construction of climate change as a “super wicked”, physical, and global problem. The term ‘super wicked problem’ comes from Levin et al. (2012). It builds on Rittel and Webber’s (1973) concept of ‘wicked problem’, used to describe social policy problems that had multiple, interconnected causes and no single solution, such as drug trafficking or social injustice. A ‘super wicked’ problem shares these characteristics, but has further challenges: time is running out, there is no central authority to address it, those who are seeking to solve the problem are also causing it, and traditional cost-benefit analysis on which a lot of policy is based discounts the future in such a way that long-term consequences are undervalued (Levin et al., 2012).
Taking a institutional approach that focuses on the United States, Hulme traces four cultural “moments” that have shaped the current dominant narrative of anthropogenic climate change in Western culture. As mentioned previously, it was the climate models developed in the 1960s that first alerted scientists to the potential future impacts of a global temperature rise. The 1960s also saw growing environmental movements in Europe and the United States, with Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* considered a significant marker in bringing the destructive impact of human activity on nature into the public consciousness. The second cultural moment identified by Hulme is the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. This led to a UN Declaration, where, for the first time, the international community recognized that natural resources and wildlife needed to be safeguarded, the Earth’s capacity to produce renewable resources needed to be maintained, and pollution must not exceed the environment’s capacity to clean itself (United Nations, 1972). The Club of Rome’s seminal report *The Limits to Growth* was also published in 1972. This challenged the growth-oriented models on which capitalist economies had built themselves post-WWII, positing that infinite growth was impossible in a world of limited material resources (Meadows et al., 1972).

Then came what Hulme calls the ‘greenhouse summer’ of 1988, during which the USA experienced an unusual heat wave. NASA scientist James Hansen testified before a Senate committee that he could state with “99 percent confidence” that a recent, persistent rise in global temperature had been detected. “The greenhouse effect has been detected,” he claimed, “and is changing our climate now” (Shabecoff, 1988:1). As I have mentioned, the IPCC was created that same year with the mandate to assess scientific information relevant to human-induced climate change, its impacts, and the options for adaptation and mitigation (see Appendix 2 for a glossary of key terms in international climate policy) (IPCC, 2006).

The final moment identified by Hulme is the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the subsequent ‘War on Terror’ waged by the United States and some of its allies in the Middle East. This geopolitical event, Hulme argues, provided “new linguistic and metaphorical repertoires” to speak of climate change as a war to be waged against the natural elements. For example, in an article published in the American magazine *New Republic*, environmentalist Bill McKibben stated that we were “under attack from climate change – and our only hope is to mobilize like we did in WWII” (2016). This final point is perhaps
overemphasized. War rhetoric was already very present in American policy, ever since the War on Drugs declared by President Nixon in 1971. Studies in the field of medicine have also pointed out that martial vocabulary had permeated health discourse long before 9/11 (Hodgkin, 1985). However, as Hulme argues, war rhetoric also now permeated climate discourse.

Following Hulme’s argument around these ‘cultural moments’ allows us to see how perceptions can be shaped over the years, influencing what ends up being the subject of policy making. With its focus on American politics, this reading leaves little room for alternative, non-Western interpretation of how the international climate regime came to be and why it functions the way it does.

That is not to say that there are no dissident views within Western academia on the current status quo or call for reforms. Smith and Howe (2015) for example argue that the focus on acquiring more evidence through processes like the IPCC Assessment Reports are misplaced. They describe climate change as a “social drama”. Drawing from classical Greek theatre and ethics, they argue that “the world of public affairs is very much one that is constructed by the players, narrated by observers, and read by audiences in a dramatic mode” (p.96). Instead of focusing on potential dangers and visions of apocalyptic futures, they propose that those who wish to avoid the “hot, unjust, and dangerous future” that climate change may engender should adopt the dramatic mode of romance in the classical sense, with its associated “world-transforming, solidaristic opportunities” (p.40). It should be noted that this view only contests part of the current narrative – its placing of “prophetic” scientific evidence, to use Walsh’s (2013) phrase again at the centre of a call of drastic action. It does not, however, acknowledge the interpretation that climate effects will lead to a “hot, unjust and dangerous future” is heavily culturally laden in itself.

Crucial to this dominant narrative is the understanding of climate change as a transboundary issue, one which needs to be addressed at the international level. In the next section, I will make the case for why the prominence of this international dimension of climate change means that the arena in which international policy is shaped is one that is fundamental to the understanding of climate change as a cultural object.
2.2 Climate Change and International Policy

The shaping of climate change as a transboundary, global issue has given prominence to the international level of governance. Over the past thirty years, institutions have developed to coordinate climate knowledge (the IPCC) as well as action (the UNFCCC), shaping in turn an internationally agreed understanding of what exactly falls under the realm of ‘climate policy’. Though the importance of climate policy has ebbed and flowed over the years, it has been sufficient for the yearly COP meetings to attract Ministers and Heads of states. Climate is on the diplomatic agenda of all larger nation states (with perhaps the exception of the United States under the Trump administration), making it a topic of discussion in other venues of international politics, such as the G8 and G20 meetings or the United Nations General Assembly.

Continuing with the approach of the previous section, I will first give an account of what the dominant narrative has been to explain the shaping of these institutions. Second, I will review some of the theoretical work that has been influential in making sense of this evolution. Before delving into this, it is first useful to consider how positivist theory understands the turning of social issues into policy issues.

2.2.1 From scientific issue to policy issue

So far I have looked at the dual nature of climate change as a scientific and cultural object. I have also argued that it has been shaped as a problem, requiring solutions. This section examines in further detail this process of policy problematising.

Agenda Setting theory (Kingdon, 1984) offers a useful way to think about this. This is also known as the Multiple Streams theory because it identifies two streams: the politics and the policy stream. In the political stream, expert information is used to translate a condition into a problem; that is, to convince governmental authorities that something must be done about it. Thus an issue becomes a policy problem. In the policy stream, stakeholders link this problem to solutions, which are conveyed by policy entrepreneurs. An idea survives in the policy stream if it is both technically feasible and has value acceptability. In the case of climate change, the discovery of man’s influence on the global climate was transformed from a condition to a problem once it was realized that it could have repercussions that would threaten the way of
life of current and future generations. Hart and Victor (1993) trace the co-evolution of climate change research and policy in the United States by highlighting the crucial role of scientific elites as mediators between scientists and politicians. They show how scientific elites acted as ‘policy entrepreneurs’ to argue that the findings coming from climate change research should form a basis for policymaking, and how, in turn, policy influenced the direction that climate change research took, away from fundamental research and towards providing evidence for decision-making. Once the policy problem was formalised it was regulated in different ways, with the United Kingdom becoming the first nation to explicitly have a climate change law (the Climate Change Act of 2008). Solutions were provided by advisors, in the form of the Climate Change Committee, to stay with the British example (CCC, 2008). Targets were set in the form of greenhouse gas emissions reduction (the current UK target is to reach ‘net-zero’ emissions by 2050, i.e. to not emit more than the country can reabsorb or transform), and pathways suggested to reach these targets. This is notably done through Integrated Assessment Models which, as their name indicates, model the impact of certain economic and social policies on the global climate system (Clarke, 2014).

A limitation of this theory is that it provides a linear reading of politics turning into policy, failing to fully capture debates or contentions that may arise along the way. The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF, Weible and Sabatier, 2007) helps us to formalise this dynamic. When there is contention, as is the case for climate change as discussed above, different stakeholders organise into advocacy coalitions that hold congruent beliefs and develop strategies to advocate for specific policy outcomes (Weible et al., 2011). This approach allows us to see the human element of policy-shaping, seeing actors not as rational units with perfect information who simply react to problems arising, but real-life human beings with their own preferences and limitations. They may rely on scientific information, but also need the help of heuristics (mental shortcuts) and affects (how information is processed emotionally) to process this information. This leads decisions to be made under bounded rationality. The most important heuristic for decision-making, according to the ACF, is a hierarchical belief system divided in three tiers (core beliefs, policy beliefs and secondary beliefs).

This idea, that policy doesn’t result from a neat linear succession of events that an all-knowing policymaking entity is able to fully capture and analyse, but rather emerges more organically from debate among human actors with their own biases and limitations is particularly
important to bear in mind when considering an issue as contentious as climate change. It also modulates the structural advantage that a group might have over another, emphasising the importance of coalitions of beliefs over the formal hierarchy of established dominant organisations (Grundmann, 2001). As I will show in the next section, the dynamics between groups of actors, that would traditionally have been considered legitimate in an international setting (e.g. local and private sector actors), changed. This led to a restructuring of international climate governance.

2.2.2 The shaping of an international policy issue

As already mentioned, the IPCC was set up to conduct a scientific assessment of climate change. Scientists from around the world volunteer to contribute their technical knowledge, which is then collated into a report. Unlike other scientific organisations, the IPCC’s reports are subject to approval by an assembly of delegations from 194 countries, thus striking a balance between scientific rigour and diplomatic viability. Those same 194 countries are part of the UNFCCC, a United Nations body that convenes yearly to negotiate international agreements on the issue. The first of these agreements, the Kyoto Protocol, was signed in 1997. It expired in 2012 and was replaced in 2015 by the Paris Agreement.

The Kyoto Protocol ran into difficulties, not the least of which being that it had no enforcement mechanism: countries entered it on a voluntary basis and there was no penalty for leaving it or for not meeting one’s target. In the end, only European Union countries managed to meet their targets, and only in the period that the EU expanded to include former USSR countries, whose economies vastly deflated after the fall of the Soviet Union, rather than because of actual reduction in emissions of Western EU countries (Falkner, 2016).

In 2015, a new accord came to replace the ‘failed’ Kyoto Protocol: the Paris Agreement. The literature points to three most significant changes that the Paris Agreement brought about: firstly, the introduction of a temperature goal, the switch from a top-down to a bottom-up approach, and a broader recognition of the multilevel nature of climate governance.

Schleussner et al. (2016) give a historical account of the temperature goal, first introduced as an element of negotiation at COP16 in Cancun. The eventual goal enshrined in the Paris Agreement is to keep global temperature rise to “well below 2°C above preindustrial levels
and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels” (UNFCCC, 2015a). The inclusion of an “aspirational” 1.5°C target was championed by small island nations, for whom respecting such a goal was a matter of survival. It also prompted the IPCC report SR15 discussed above which eventually led to a change in public discourse, with the rise of terms like “climate emergency” and the twelve-year “deadline”. McLaren and Markusson (2020) warn that this framing around temperature goals is but the latest in a series of scientific targets set by the UNFCCC that were driven each time by “technological promises” of the period embedded in the models that produced those goals. Negative emission technologies are the current technology that promise achievable paths towards a 2°C/1.5°C limit, even though we do not (yet) possess the knowledge to deploy them beyond experimental installations (ibid.).

Secondly, in light of the failure of Kyoto’s mutually verifiable emission reduction targets, Paris set out a new approach, based on individual pledges, or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). This bottom-up approach sought to garner the support of developed countries, notably the United States, giving them freedom on their choice of national target and how to reach it. The NDC system was also extended to all Parties to the Convention, so that large developing nations like India and China now had to submit pledges, their exclusion from the Kyoto targets having also been a point of contention for the United States and other developed countries. Crucially, the Agreement included a “ratchet mechanism” with countries having to submit new, more ambitious NDCs every five years, but the specific rules on how this system would be monitored was to be decided at a later date. At the time of writing (i.e., as of COP25), this “Rulebook” had yet to be completely agreed upon (Evans and Gabbattiss, 2019).

Another motivation for the NDC system was to make it easier for civil society of various countries to keep their own governments accountable, exercising pressure if commitments were not met.4 Leading up to Paris, there had been an increased acknowledgement, both in the diplomatic and academic circles, that nation states were not the only key actors in the international climate regime. On the diplomatic side, COPs were increasingly becoming a site

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4 This would, of course, only be possible in those countries where civil society enjoyed enough freedom to be in a position to exercise pressure on their government at all.
for non-state actors to meet up, either to seek to influence the negotiations, or to build connections and exchange information among themselves (Betsill et al., 2015; Cabré, 2011; Hale and Roger, 2014; Hjerpe and Linnér, 2010). Under the leadership of France, COP21 was designed as a high-level meeting, not only for heads of states, but for local governors and mayors, business leaders and others. Streck (2021) has since challenged the long-term viability of such an involvement as she argues it has not been sufficiently formalised in the UNFCCC process and the exact rules of engagement for non-state actors (who gets to participate, what their impact should be, how it is evaluated etc.) remains unclear.

2.2.3 From theory to practice and back again

This conceptual evolution, from a top-down to bottom-up approach with an increased recognition of non-state actors, marks an evolution in the dominant thinking of how international climate policy should be organised, driven by theoretical contributions from the fields of international relations and policy theory.

International relations offers us a useful way of thinking about how international policy is orchestrated thanks to the concept of regimes, or the “institutions possessing norms, decision rules, and procedures which facilitate a convergence of expectations” (Krasner, 1983:1). A good example of this is the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was first signed in 1968 and now counts 189 country signatories. It limits the number of countries allowed to equip themselves with a nuclear arsenal, and defines precise rules for the civil use of nuclear energy for electricity generation. These rules are enforced by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Taking a historical view, Marshall (2015) argues that the climate regime set up under the Kyoto Protocol was influenced by three things: the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and the 1990 Clean Air Act in the United States. START was a bilateral treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was a key tool in the United States’ negotiation arsenal towards the de-escalation of the arms race throughout the 1980s and was finally signed in 1992 by George H. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev. The Montreal Protocol, for its part, was signed in 1987 and came into action in 1989. Like the UNFCCC, it addressed an environmental issue that affected the planet at a global level: the depletion of the ozone layer. This depletion was caused by an increase in
the concentration of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) due to industrial activity. To address this, the Protocol put in place a Phase-Out management plan of these gases which would be reviewed every four years through a scientific assessment. This encouraged business-led technical innovation and set up a permit trading system for emitting countries. A permit trading system was also implemented in the United States to address acid rain caused by sulphur dioxide emissions via the Clean Air Act of 1990. This allowed coal-burning power plants to trade pollution ‘allowances’ which were given out at a diminishing rate (the idea being that it would give the opportunity to the plants for which it was cheaper to depollute first and give more expensive plants some more time to plan out their depollution strategy).\(^5\)

Like START, the Kyoto Protocol attempted to establish a timetable for mutually verifiable reductions (in warheads in one case and greenhouse emissions in the other). Like the Montreal Protocol, it is subject to scientific assessments produced at regular intervals (by the IPCC). With the Acid Rain Program, Kyoto also tried to establish a market of tradable carbon allowances. However, unlike these three programs, the Kyoto Protocol ultimately failed to produce any significant emissions reduction (Aichele and Felbermayr, 2012; Peters et al., 2011). It was not ratified by the United States, Australia pulled out, and most of the reduction witnessed over the period came from a decrease in economic activity in Eastern Europe due to the collapse of the USSR, rather than actual efforts to reduce greenhouse emissions (Morel and Shishlov, 2014). In fact, as Prins and Rayner (2007) argue, addressing climate change in that way was misleading. Ozone depletion was caused by a small number of artificial gases for which substitutes could be found. Acid rain was mainly caused by a single industrial sector (power generation), and only a small number of countries were involved in START’s timetable for mutually verifiable reduction in nuclear warheads. None of this is true in the case of climate change.

While a useful analysis, this historical view only captures one part of the policy story. For one thing, the process described by Marshall mainly concerns mitigation: the efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) in order to limit global warming. But climate policy encompasses several other areas of work. One is concerned with adaptation: authorities must

\(^5\) For more on the turn to market-based environmental policy under Reagan, see Vig and Kraft (1984).

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respond to the changes that are already happening, and plan to protect their communities against future threats. Key to the success of adaptation, and a hotly debated topic at the UNFCCC, is the question of finance. The Kyoto Protocol divided “Annex I” developed countries who had to pursue mitigation efforts, and “Annex II” countries who were to be recipients of finance, as well as technology transfers, to help them implement adaptation plans. Countries were designated using the concept of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR), meaning that not all countries have the same level of responsibility for climate change because some pollute more than others today, but also crucially, because some have been polluting for longer than others. An even more contentious issue is that of loss and damages. This refers to the debate regarding setting up a formal system for countries to demand reparations when irreparable damage has occurred, such as the complete loss of an island and its culture due to sea-level rise. Finally, climate policy can be divided by sectors of activity: energy, industry, agriculture, forestry, and maritime activity to name but a few.

Marshall’s analysis also takes for granted that nation states are the valid unit of study here. By contrast, Elinor Ostrom, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009 for her work on the Global Commons, argued in a seminal paper for a “polycentric” view of climate governance, explaining that action would need to come from different locations and parts of society (Ostrom, 2009). Building on this, Keohane and Victor (2011) argued in an influential paper that the global governance of climate change does not exist as a single, centralized regime. Instead, it is a regime complex of institutions with various overlapping goals and levels of action. This complex, illustrated in Figure 3, is made up of the climate-specific institutions such as the ones described above, as well as other local, national and international organizations whose remits overlap with climate change policy.
The inclusion of non-state actors within the framework of the Paris Agreement appears to be an attempt at better capturing this complex institutional ecology. As Hsu et al. (2015:501) noted shortly before COP21, “overall the landscape of climate governance has started to exhibit some of the characteristics of polycentricity foreseen by Elinor Ostrom”. This increased acknowledgement of the key roles of a diversity of actors was further encouraged at the following COP with the creation of the Marrakesh Partnership, a programme of the UNFCCC that nominates Champions (leaders in civil society and business who have distinguished themselves for their climate action) and fosters networks among them (UNFCCC, 2016). All this led Falkner (2016:107) to conclude that “[the Paris Agreement] has managed to better align international climate policy with the realities of international climate politics.” In Falkner’s view, by including all countries in efforts of mitigation and adaptation, as well as non-state actors, the Agreement had the potential to become an “orchestrator” of climate
action “well beyond the realm of traditional international governance”, better equipped to handle the complicated landscape of this ‘superwicked’ issue.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced the dominant narratives that have shaped climate change as a scientifically-driven policy issue that has been addressed by nation states through coordination of national policies and international cooperation. This shaping has been met with resistance along the way, notably through the defiance of scientific consensus, which is now decreasing globally (mainly persisting in English-speaking countries). It calls on a variety of values such as the place of humans in the natural world, well-being, fairness and governance, leading to more disagreement still on what should be done to address climate change (if anything), who should do it, and how they should go about doing it.

As a transboundary phenomenon, I argue that international cooperation (or lack thereof) is one of the key areas that one should consider to understand how humans are dealing with climate change. I have therefore traced the development of international policy, and offered some explanations as to how the governing institutions of the climate regime complex has been shaped. In particular, I have shown how theoretical contributions to the fields of international relations and policy studies have influenced how this complex evolved from the ‘Kyoto regime’ to the ‘Paris regime’. I’ve also briefly presented the Advocacy Coalition Framework, as an example of a policy theory that seeks to capture how belief systems and inter-personal interactions shape what ends up being the subject of policy, and the corresponding range of solutions that can be applied to it. While it is a framework developed to understand a national policy setting, it does find echoes in the international setting of the UNFCCC, a forum where groups and coalitions driven by different motives interact – a fact that will become more apparent in later chapters. Kukkonen et al. (2018) for example use the framework to trace how international organisations such as the UNFCCC influence national policy through the “domestication of global norms”.

The next four chapters will delve progressively deeper into the inner workings of the UNFCCC and the narratives told by policy actors to make sense of it and the one hand, and push for their policy agendas, on the other hand.

The first stop is at the surface: the public face of international climate policy as it is reported in the media. To do this, I look at a specific policy event: President Trump’s decision to leave the Paris Agreement in June 2017. This event was chosen because it garnered a lot of media
attention at the time, both domestically and internationally. At the same time, and as I will explain in Chapter 4, the announcement was misleading. The rules of the Paris Agreement indeed meant that the United States could not formally leave before 2020, after the end of President Trump's first term in office. His ability to follow through with this announcement therefore relied on his being re-elected in 2020. The size of the press sample to potentially analyse combined with this ambiguity therefore made it a particularly interesting event to focus on.
Chapter 3 - Heads of States and Media Narratives

Tracing how policy narratives emerge in the public space is important to understanding how policymakers explain their actions to the public, as well as how the public perceives said actions. In this I add a specific focus on narratival characteristics to the considerable body of literature that analyses media coverage of climate change that I presented in Chapter 2. I do this through the use of a case study: President Trump’s announcement in June 2017 that the United States would be leaving the Paris Agreement. I look at news actors’ own discourses as well as the media reporting of it, in order to trace the narrative transformations that Trump’s announcement underwent as it travelled back and forth across the public/policy interface.

I unpick the discursive strategy behind Trump’s announcement, as well as the reactions of three major players of the Agreement: the United Kingdom, France and Germany. I will focus on official speeches made by three of these countries’ respective heads of governments (British Prime Minister Theresa May did not, at the time, speak out in an official capacity). This will lead to an analysis of the media coverage of this policy event in eighteen daily newspapers distributed in the US, the UK, France and Germany throughout the month following President Trump’s announcement. I find that, unlike the political speeches of the heads of states, the narratives found in this sample serve two main functions: the first is to contextualise the policy event at different levels, and the second is to shed light on the political process that led to this event. Looking at this sample through the lens of narrative also allows me to analyse how these newspapers portray the character of Donald Trump as a protagonist of these narratives.
3.1. Public Speeches Analysis

In this section, I first analyse Donald Trump’s announcement speech, followed by the two speeches that Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron made as direct responses. I use the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), developed by Jones and McBeth (2010). As discussed in Chapter 1, this framework aims to identify whether a given text contains a narrative according to certain attributes, and analyse how this narrative functions in a policy context. In the NPF, a text is said to possess ‘narrativity’ if there is an identifiable plot with a beginning, middle, and end, as well as characters who perform archetypal roles and project that shape onto the story world. For policy narratives, the NPF argues that there will often be a problem identified by the narrator, and a solution offered to act as narrative resolution, whether it is endorsed by the narrator (in the case of a narrative advocating for a particular solution) or not (in the case of a narrative criticising a given solution). Three archetypal characters populate these narratives: the victims who suffer from the policy problem, the villains who cause it, and the heroes who solve it.

3.1.1 Trump

Donald Trump announced that he intended to start the process for the United States to leave the Paris Agreement on 2 June 2017 in a twenty-five minute televised speech in the Rose Garden at the White House. The United States had formally joined the Paris Agreement by executive order from his predecessor Barack Obama in April 2016. Leaving it was a possibility that Trump had raised during his electoral campaign and he had reportedly been seeking council since his election to decide on how to proceed.

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6 Theresa May never made a direct response. Instead, an official statement of around 120 words was released on the day relaying that the Prime Minister had spoken on the phone with President Trump and “expressed her disappointment with the decision and stressed that the UK remained committed to the Paris Agreement” (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017). It should be noted that the UK was days away from a general election (which occurred on June 8 2017) and London was the target of a terrorist attack on June 4, both events possibly explaining why international climate policy may not have been a priority during these weeks.

7 Unlike the Kyoto Protocol which was a treaty and needed to be ratified by the United States Congress, the Paris Accord is a voluntary agreement, and is not therefore subject to congressional approval.
Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign slogan was “Make America Great Again”. He finished his Rose Garden speech by reiterating this slogan. Making America great again, of course, implies that the country was once greater than it is today. When this was exactly, we do not know, and it thus takes on a mythical quality, a paradise now lost. A decline has already occurred, or we would not need to restore greatness, and the decline will worsen as a result of the Paris Agreement. “Compliance with the terms of the Paris Accord could cost America as much as 2.7 million lost jobs by 2025,” claims Trump in the speech.

Figure 3.1. A visual representation of the plot of Donald Trump’s speech, according to whether the events described are positive or negative.

The cost would also come in the form of “billions and billions” of dollars contributed to the Green Climate Fund – a financial mechanism set up by the UNFCCC to promote low-carbon and climate resilient development projects. It is to avoid this catastrophic future that the United States will “withdraw from the Paris climate Accord”.  

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8 While the UNFCCC officially uses the term “Paris Agreement”, in this context the words “Agreement” and “Accord” can be used interchangeably.
It is therefore a narrative used to criticise the policy solution that had been designed by the previous administration. Implied is that through his action of leaving the Paris Agreement, all these terrible things will not happen.

*Characters: Fighting a bad deal*

Analysing the narrative in terms of its characters highlights a second core theme of Trump’s speech: the idea of unfairness. It is not only the case that entering the Paris Agreement is hurting America and leading to a decline. This decline was wilfully orchestrated by others, adding insult to injury. Analysing the narrative in terms of the characters who are featured highlights this mechanism.

As explained in the previous section, Trump sees the Paris Agreement as a bad deal. The victims of that deal are clearly identified in the first few minutes of the speech: they are the “American workers, who I [Trump] love, and taxpayers”. Because of the Paris Agreement, they will have to “absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lowered wages, shuttered factories and vastly diminished economic production.” He specifically refers to coal miners, who he also “loves”, a clear nod to one of his core supporter demographics (West Virginia, where a quarter of coal miners live, was also the state where Trump scored best in the 2016 elections; 68.5% of votes, compared to the 46.1% national average, Energy Information Administration, 2005; Leamon and Bucelato, 2017).

Coal miners are suffering because “The Paris Climate Accord is simply the latest example of Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries.” The villains are divided into two groups: “Washington” and “other countries”. Ironic as it may seem, the paradox of accusing “Washington” while standing in its very centre is a recurrent feature of Trump’s rhetoric. One of his campaign slogans was a promise to “drain the swamp” (Widmer, 2017). This metaphor, often used in American politics (notably by Ronald Reagan in his campaign to cut down government budget in the 1980s), has been used by Donald Trump to distance himself from the political establishment (Jacobson, 2018).

The other group of villains is later qualified more precisely as the “foreign capitals and global activists that have long sought to gain wealth at our country’s expense”. The Agreement, Trump claims, “punishes the United States [… ] the world’s leader in environmental protection,
while imposing no meaningful obligation on the world’s leading polluters.” Both China and India are named as these leading polluters (though the CO₂ emissions per capita of the US are more than twice that of China’s, and almost ten times that of India, and this without even including the historical responsibility of Western countries who have been emitting greenhouse gases for far longer than the developing economies of Asia).³

By naming these villains, Trump lends intentionality to a phenomenon from which his supporters are suffering. Many coal miners lost their jobs in recent years as production has declined and plants are shutting down. The economic argument usually put forward is that the price of other, cleaner energy sources such as natural gas and solar have been decreasing, making coal comparatively less competitive (Kolstad, 2017). According to Trump’s narrative, however, it is not faceless market forces that are to blame. It is the international community, personified by China and India, that has been working to directly hurt American workers. “The Agreement doesn’t eliminate coal jobs,” he argues, “it just transfers those jobs out of America and the United States, and ships them to foreign countries.” These countries are explicitly portrayed as malicious: “at what point does America get demeaned?” he asks, “at what point do they start laughing at us as a country?”

This appeal to patriotism and American pride adds a distinctively nationalist flair to Trump’s protectionist argument. Trump indeed goes one step further in instilling fear among his audience, by claiming that the money the US dedicated to the Green Climate Fund was “raided out of America’s budget for the war against terrorism.”

The victims have been recognized, their “laughing” villains identified. The hero is, of course, Trump himself. He opens the speech by saying: “I am fighting every day for the great people of this country.

³ Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center, Environmental Sciences Division, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Tennessee, United States as presented by the World Bank (2018).
Therefore, in order to fulfil my solemn duty to protect America and its citizens, the United States will withdraw from the Paris climate Accord.” He thus portrays himself as a lone hero standing up to defend the victims who elected him against exploitative and demeaning external forces.
3.1.2 Merkel

The following day, Chancellor Angela Merkel reacted in a four minute statement from her office at the Chancellery, calling the decision “regrettable”.

Plot: stymied progress

Her narrative starts in Berlin in 1995, where Parties to the UNFCCC, which had been created three years earlier in Rio, came together for the first Convention of the Parties (or COP). Merkel traces the life of this negotiation process, mentioning the Kyoto Protocol, and finally the “historical” achievement of 194 parties to sign the Paris Agreement. The Agreement is described as the “cornerstone of cooperation between the countries of the world”, “irreversible” and “indispensable to fulfil the goals of the Agenda 2030”. This contextualisation is not innocuous. Agenda 2030 is the overarching goal which currently organises the work of the United Nations as a whole. It is divided into seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as the eradication of poverty by 2030 (SDG 1) or access to clean water and sanitation for all (SDG 6) (UN, 2015).

Figure 3.3. A visual representation of the plot of Angela Merkel’s speech, according to whether the events described are positive or negative.

Mentioning it here in this speech reminds the listener that climate change is not an isolated issue, like a border dispute or food labelling. Since climate change has the potential to increase
existing problems like food and water scarcity, it threatens the achievement of every other UN goal.

The next step in the plot is Trump’s decision to withdraw. It is “regrettable”, but, she goes on to explain, “this decision cannot and will not stop all those of us who feel committed to protecting our planet. To the contrary, we in Europe and the world will join forces, to take up the great challenge to humanity that is climate change and successfully tackle it.”

The speech follows what the NPF would call a “stymied progress” structure (Shanahan et al., 2018). The policy issue, here international cooperation in climate change, was on a positive track, thanks to the Paris Agreement. Things then turn for the worse, here due to the United States pulling out, but they eventually pick up again. Merkel’s narrative indeed builds the impression that this decision is only a temporary setback. If anything, it will renew the determination of all other parties to “join their forces” and fight even harder to “tackle” the problem. The focus is different from Trump’s speech, which was solely focused on consequences for the USA, where Merkel makes a point about how the American President’s actions also have repercussions for the rest of the world.

**Characters: a united international community**

The stymied progress plot is articulated around a hero who first helped it along, a villain who sets it back, and victims whose suffering is ultimately alleviated.

In a similar manner to Trump, Merkel uses the semantic field of combat. But here the fight has shifted. It is not a single hero fighting to defend his countrymen. It is a fight against a larger, more intangible threat: the devastating effects that man-made climate change can have (and is already having) on human populations and the natural world. Trump is therefore construed as a villain not because he is malignant, but because of the negative consequences of his actions. She does not accuse him directly, only citing his decision as “regrettable”. The phrasing echoes the colloquial saying “I’m not angry, I’m just disappointed”. Rather, it is by highlighting the danger in which the victims are put if no strong measure is taken that Merkel implies the villainy of Trump’s decision. Where Trump vilified the Green Climate Fund that was costing “billions” to Americans, Merkel explains why the fund itself is necessary, identifying two kinds of victims whom the fund helps. First are poor countries: “it is the duty of Federal Government and Germany to implement the Agreement, in particular with regards to the climate finance to help the poorest and most vulnerable countries of this world. Otherwise
we will not overcome the challenge of climate change.” The second victim is the planet itself, personified as “Mother Earth”. It is to defend Earth’s future that we must “together continue on our path.”

![Diagram showing the international community as Ally, victims as developing countries and planet, and villain as Donald Trump.]

Figure 3.4 – The characters portrayed in Merkel’s speech

As already mentioned, progress has been made thanks to the international community, pushing the plot in a positive direction. Because this represents such a vast array of actors, the collective as a whole can be assigned the role of hero, with each individual actor working as an ally to support those who are victims of climate change. Among that community, Merkel singles out three countries: her own, the Fiji islands, “whom Germany is strongly supporting in the organisation of the next Climate conference [COP23, via the UNFCCC Secretariat based in Bonn]”. They will do this, she goes on to say, “together with France”. It is interesting to note that Merkel makes no mention of who is causing climate change (that very same international community, of course).

It is also interesting to note that this international community is not just composed of nation states. “I am also deeply moved and amazed by how many groups, states and companies, including from within the United States, want to follow this path with us.” Just as the victims
are global, the solution to addressing the problem comes through the coming together of the
global community, and one political decision by Trump alone will not be enough to hinder the
progress that has been achieved.

3.1.3 Macron

Let us now turn to France. Merkel explicitly mentioned her collaboration with this country in
her speech. The Paris Agreement was signed in Paris not just by chance but, as Merkel
intimated in her support of Fiji for COP23, because the country which hosts a COP also takes
the diplomatic lead on running the negotiation process.\textsuperscript{10} France was instrumental in the
success of the Agreement, having appointed a Climate Ambassador who had begun work over
a year beforehand at the previous COP and in multilateral intermediary meetings in order to
gain the support of world leaders and lay the foundation for an effective negotiation session
in Paris.

In June 2017, France and Germany were closely aligned on all matters related to international
climate policy. This is due to the good relationship the countries enjoy, as well as the process
of UNFCCC negotiations itself. Formally, every party (i.e., every nation-state signatory for the
Framework Convention) gets a seat at the negotiating table (UNFCCC, 1995). During COPs
most negotiation is conducted by expert delegates in plenaries, or in side sessions on more
detailed matters. The parties usually form strategic coalitions that will negotiate with a single
voice on a given issue. This allows smaller countries to pool their forces and expertise (some
countries are only able to send one or two delegates, while a US or Chinese delegation will
typically comprise around two hundred people at the larger COPs), and gives more weight to
their positions. The European Union negotiates as a block. As the two leaders of this group
(with, until recently, the United Kingdom), France and Germany coordinate their diplomatic
positions almost to the letter, to the point of using the same wording on many issues.

Like Angela Merkel, President Emmanuel Macron gave a speech on June 2 at the Elysée Palace.
This speech was divided in two parts: six minutes in French, and three minutes in English. He

\textsuperscript{10} Occupying one of the five permanent seats at the UN Security Council, France sees its diplomatic
activity as one of its core strategic assets, with the third largest diplomatic corps in the world behind
the United States and China (Lowy Institute, 2019).
was accompanied by Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris, and Michael Bloomberg, former Mayor of New York and UN Special Envoy for Cities and Climate.

The first part of his speech in French echoed the renewed determination expressed by Angela Merkel: “what could have weakened us will [...] make us stronger, and there are now more of us, more determined and more united to win the climate battle and we will win it.” Like Merkel, he spoke of the alignment of the international community on this, citing that the “European Union, China, India and Russia [had] confirmed their engagement [to the Agreement]”. He also called the Agreement “irreversible”, and said that it would be upheld because it was “our responsibility”.

Macron also drew attention to the non-state actors engaged in the process. “A government does not summarize a nation. Other actors have stood up – political, economic, from civil society – and thousands of promising initiatives are being born. We will support them and we will fight alongside them.” The physical presence of Mayor Hidalgo and Mr Bloomberg served to personify these non-state actors.

**Characters: scientists in peril**

The second part of Macron’s speech, in English, shifted the focus, not the least because it is highly unusual for a French president, speaking from his presidential palace, to make official statements that are not in French.

“Now, let me say a few words to our American friends,” he says. Part of the speech reiterates what was said in French, and he still portrays Trump as the villain, or at least an antagonist: “I do respect his decision, but I do think this is an actual mistake both for the US and for our planet.”

He also echoed the victims mentioned by Angela Merkel: “Everyone is impacted. And if we do nothing, our children will know a world of uncontrolled migrations, of wars, of shortages. A dangerous world.” But he also identified a more specific group of victims: the “scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, responsible citizens who were disappointed by the decision of the President of the United States.” To them he says that “they will find in France a second homeland.”

In this narrative, it is therefore not a generic, perhaps distant, group of countries or the natural world that is at threat. It is the more tangible American citizens feeling disenfranchised by the
decision of their president. Where Angela Merkel made an appeal to protect the poor and the environment, Emmanuel Macron made an appeal to “protect” America’s intellectual elite, and by extension its scientific and innovative power. He invited them to “come and work here with us, to work together on concrete solutions for our climate, our environment.”

Figure 3.5 – The characters portrayed in Macron’s speech.

With this shift of victims also comes a shift of hero. Where Merkel portrayed Germany as one part of the international community, supporting, in general terms, the efforts of collaboration on climate, Macron was more direct in demonstrating the role of France as a leader in the field, and his personal role as the driving force of that movement: “I myself have had during the day several diplomatic contacts during which I confirmed the will of France to reaffirm its engagement and have noticed the willingness of the people with whom I spoke to confirm theirs […] I have indicated yesterday night that France will take new concrete initiatives.” When later he stated that he believed the American decision to be a mistake, he added: “I just said President Trump in a few words a few minutes ago this assessment [sic]”.

67
Plot: stymied progress

The plot, too, is different from Merkel’s. The first two steps are the same: progress had been achieved thanks to the Paris Agreement; the United States pulling out is a step back. But since the characters at play are different, the way in which Macron’s narrative is resolved is different. Merkel hinted at the fact that Germany would look for a solution to the potential loss of funding for the Green Climate Fund and help developing countries in their efforts to respond to the effects of climate change. Macron focuses on attracting scientists to his country: “France will help with all its might all of those who want to change things and succeed in this crucial fight for our future,” he states. “We will welcome them in France, we will accompany them in their work wherever they are.” It is in this safe haven that he promises scientists that solutions will be found to combat climate change and ultimately solve the problem.

Figure 3.6 - A visual representation of the plot of Angela Merkel’s speech, according to whether the events described are positive or negative.

He finishes his speech on the following aspirational words: “I call on you to remain confident. We will succeed, because we are fully committed. Because wherever we live,
whoever we are, we all share the same responsibility: Make Our Planet Great Again.” By telling such a story, Macron does not simply go further than the consensual European position expressed by Merkel. He also explicitly refers to Trump’s rhetoric, and turns it on its head. The plot ends at a higher point than Merkel’s, because Macron frames the withdrawal not just as a temporary setback, but as an opportunity to go even further than before.

Analysing these speeches through a narrative lens has helped us understand how Donald Trump’s justified his decision within his broader worldview, and how he appeals to his coalmining voting base. Through the idea of “stymied progress”, we also see how a policy event like the announcement can disrupt an existing narrative (that of international solidarity presented by Merkel) and be absorbed by it. Finally, we see how Macron successfully turned Trump’s narrative to his own rhetorical advantage.

I turn now to how these concepts carry over into the press media.
3.2. Media Analysis

Before delving into how the media covered the speeches analysed above, it is worth stopping to consider how the Trump presidency’s relationship to the media in its various forms stood apart from its predecessors. For instance, at midnight on the day prior to the announcement, President Trump had tweeted “Despite the constant negative press covfefe”. This was instantly picked up by commentators all over the world who (often humorously) attempted to decipher this cryptic message. It soon became emblematic of the tense relationship between Trump and the press as well as his idiosyncratic communication style, seeping into popular culture. Even the main coffee stand at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival that year was called “Covfefe...?” (Dowd, 2017).

![Donald J. Trump](image)

Despite the constant negative press covfefe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RETWEETS</th>
<th>LIKES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11,029</td>
<td>13,430</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12:06 AM - 31 May 2017

Figure 3.7 – Donald Trump’s “covfefe” tweet (31 May 2017, 12:06AM)

Before an analysis of the media coverage of an event related to the Trump administration, it is therefore useful to assess this claim of “constant negative press” to help put my analysis in context.

A study from Pew Research Centre (Mitchell et al., 2017) looking at over 3000 stories from across media outlets and political leanings does support Trump’s claim to some extent: they found that during the first 100 days of his presidency, stories were four times as likely to carry a negative assessment than a positive one. Putting this in a historical perspective, it was over twice as negative as the coverage of previous presidents and consistently less focused on
policy. In their first sixty days, the coverage was 62% negative for Donald Trump, 20% negative for Barack Obama, and 28% negative for both George W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

Patterson (2017) found a similar amount of negative reporting. Looking at the sources of the story, he points out that “what is truly atypical about Trump’s coverage is that it’s sharply negative despite the fact that he’s the source of nearly two-thirds of the sound bites surrounding his coverage.” Usually, when newsmakers and targeted groups complain that their coverage is overly negative, he argues, it is “because they’re not given a chance to speak for themselves”, a claim Trump can clearly hardly make. The report also looks at international coverage, concluding that European journalists were more likely to “directly question Trump’s fitness for office” than their American colleagues.

\[\text{Figure 3.8 – Themes discussed in the US coverage of Trump’s first 100 days. Each rectangle’s area represents a percentage, with different colours denoting their broader category.}\]

In a breakdown of themes, Paterson found that 56% covered domestic policy issues (including immigration, health care, terrorist threats), 21% covered foreign policy (including international trade and defence), 14% covered Trump as a president (including his personal background, fitness for office, and the controversy surrounding Russia’s involvement in the
election), with 9% falling under “Other”. Here the Paris Agreement announcement falls under the 21% of coverage concerning international policy (in green on Figure 3.8).

3.2.1 Methodology

The following analysis is based on a sample of media texts from different countries that I judged to be representative, relevant, comparable and accessible. I then used an NPF methodology to ask the following research questions:

- Which of these texts are narratives?
- What types of narratives are they?
- What are the themes they approach?
- Who are the characters and how are they portrayed?

Selecting the Sample

The first step in selecting the sample was to decide which media form to look at. Since I wanted to understand how both the event itself and the respective reactions analysed above were portrayed in the press, I needed to compare media narratives from four countries in three languages. I had to eliminate as many factors as possible that would hinder the comparison, such as discussing the different narrative devices used in print and in television reporting. I also felt that analysing the different narrative modes of legacy media versus new digital media was an enterprise of its own that would distract from my research questions (see Painter et al., 2016 for a comparison of coverage of climate change in digital media). I therefore focused on legacy print media outlets and their online content, but excluded digitally native outlets such as Buzzfeed or The Huffington Post. I gathered the legacy news content from the online press database Factiva. Based on content availability of this database, I selected the nineteen outlets presented in Figure 3.9, taking care to capture a variety of political leanings for each country.\(^{11}\) When the outlet had different local editions, I included all of them.

\(^{11}\) It should be noted that the right is mostly absent from this sampling in the United States. This is due to the fact that right-wing media in the United States mostly makes use of television (e.g. Fox News) and radio (e.g. The Rush Limbaugh Show) (Mitchell et al., 2014).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Political leaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
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<td></td>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>The Daily Mail</td>
<td>Right</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Telegraph</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Daily Mirror</td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Scotsman</td>
<td>Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Times</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Süddeutsche Zeitung</td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tageszeitung</td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Die Welt</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>Right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Libération</td>
<td>Left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le Parisien</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.9 - Newspaper sampled and their political leanings.*

I then searched the database for the keywords “Trump AND Paris”. These ensured that I captured all possible mentions of the event, regardless of language or description (English uses Agreement and Accord, German uses PariserAbkommen and Klima Abkommen, etc.).
period sampled covered the one-month period after Trump’s speech, between 1 June 2017 and 30 June 2017. This enabled me to build a database of news articles containing the following attributes: name of publication, title, date of publication, author, standfirst, word count, full article.

Factiva did not hold an abstract or the full article for three of these newspapers: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Le Figaro and Libération. These were added manually to my database from the respective websites of these news organisations by cross-referencing the title and date of each entry. Finally, I read through the database and manually eliminated redundancies (i.e. entries that had the same title and abstract). The result was a database comprising 1711 articles (823 from the US, 534 from the UK, 208 from France and 144 from Germany).

Identifying the narratives

Next came the task of identifying which of these articles were narratives. I eliminated a number of daily news round-ups that were brief summaries of previous articles and only mentioned the Paris Agreement in one or two sentences. Podcasts and videos were also excluded for the sake of comparability. After reading through the first fifty articles in the database, I realized that most entries below 500 words were too short to develop full narratives (being either the aforementioned round-ups or short descriptive dispatches from news agencies such as Reuters or Agence France Presse). All entries below 500 words were therefore discarded. The remaining 1146 articles were still too large a sample to be able to be analysed qualitatively. Using a 95% confidence level, I determined that randomly selecting one-third of the database would create a representative sample. These 382 articles were screened again for false positives (for example, eliminating articles that discussed Trump’s visit to France on Bastille Day the following month).

The remaining 190 articles were analysed following an NPF-like method, using the coding sheet in Appendix 2. This sheet was tested on a small sample of ten articles by fellow PhD students to ensure that we were reaching the same results. The first section, designed to determine whether the article contained a narrative, is divided in four parts:

1. Characters:
   - A villain that causes the problem;
   - A victim harmed by the problem;
   - A hero or ally that fixes, or attempts to fix the problem.
These characters can be individual (e.g. Donald Trump), groups of individuals (e.g. the G7) or personified entities (e.g. “foreign capitals”).

2. Plot: whether there is a series of events logically connected to each other with a beginning, middle and end.

3. A causal mechanism:
   - Intentional: the initiating event is caused on purpose;
   - Inadvertent: the event was caused by someone for a specific purpose, but the result was not intended;
   - Accidental: the event could not have been avoided.

4. Solutions: whether there is a moral of the story prompting action or resolution.

This method does not seek to identify narrative in a yes/no binary fashion. It is designed to assess the extent to which the text possesses narrativity. For the sake of the present analysis, I chose to include in my study any texts where a plot can be identified with at least a beginning, a middle and an end (though it may contain intermediate steps), and at least some characters with identifiable relations to each other (e.g. a victim and an ally helping said victim). Causal mechanisms and the offering of a solution are deemed to lend more narrativity to the text, but their absence is not cause enough to exclude the text from analysis.

The final sample contained 124 articles. 58 were from the US press, 33 from the UK, 20 from France and 13 from Germany. In terms of political leanings, most were from the centre-left publications (67 articles), followed by the centre-right (38 articles), with far fewer numbers on the left (8), right (6) and centre (5). These proportions correspond to the proportions found in the original sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles by country</th>
<th>Articles by political leaning of the publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>124</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.10. Break down of the sample by country and political leaning of the publication.
Such a methodology, specifically designed at selecting press articles that are explicitly narratival, means that the resulting analysis is not to be taken as a comprehensive review of all the forms of press discourse. Indeed, a lot of articles were “reaction” pieces reporting what different public figures had said about the event. Most of these articles followed the “A said B and X said Y” format which were descriptive lists with no identifiable plots. They were therefore not deemed to be narratives and were excluded from the sample.

Characterising the narratives

The second part of the analysis was focused on determining what kinds of narratives were relayed in the different newspapers I selected, and how these narratives function.

To identify recurring features in the different narratives, I coded for themes, as well as geographical regions mentioned. To track whether the newspapers picked up the different narratives developed by Donald Trump, Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, I selected the themes identified in the previous section of this chapter. In alphabetical order, these are: businesses, cities, economic policy, energy policy, environmental policy, foreign policy, Green Climate Fund, “Make the Planet Great Again”, reactions (whether an article reports how other parties reacted to the announcement), subnational government and federalism.

To these, based on the literature review I carried out and the first read-through of article titles I had conducted to construct my sample, I added the following themes: climate science, climate scepticism, press coverage (whether an article reports how other news outlet reacted to the announcement), Donald Trump’s personality, and internal affairs of the White House.

Several characters identified were likely to belong to the same groups. To get a more bird’s eye view of who were the players considered to be relevant at negotiation level, I also included a category of countries or regions: the UK, Germany and France, of course, as well as China, India, the European Union, and Canada.

Finally, to understand how these narratives function, I then included a section to identify plot structure following the nomenclature developed in the NPF (Elizabeth A. Shanahan et al., 2018):

- Stymied progress: prior progress is threatened or impeded;
- Decline: the positive or desired state is deteriorating;
• Change is only an illusion: the perceived improvement or decline is the opposite of reality;
• Helplessness: the bad situation is out of our control;
• Conspiracy: the fated bad situation is actually controlled by a select few;
• Blame the victim: the victims control or perpetuate the situation.

All quotes in the rest of the chapter come from articles in the final sample.

3.2.2 What this means for us

Policy stories told by politicians are designed in one way or another to convince their audience: convince them that there is a problem, that the politician is going to solve it, and that the decision that they are making, or will make, is the right one.

Press narratives, by contrast, are not always explicitly written to convince their audience of something. Rather, they often serve to contextualise the policy event into a broader story, asking how and why something happened, as well as considering what the repercussions are likely to be.

For the Trump announcement, this work of contextualisation happened at different levels. Because the Paris Agreement is a document that was negotiated and signed between countries, there is a macro-level where nation states and groups themselves are either personified (e.g. “EU accuses Trump of ditching the old world order” (Emanuel et al., 2017)) or their respective heads of states act as a proxy for the country (e.g. “It won’t be long before Xi Jinping takes the world stage to deliver the next keynote speech on climate protection” (Ankenbrand, 2017a)).

It is this level that the final stage of the coding sheet sought to capture. This category highlights the growing role of China as an actor of international climate policy. Ankenbrand (2017b) for example ponders in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on the role reversal that has occurred since 2009, when the United States led by Barack Obama championed negotiations in Copenhagen (which eventually failed), to the present day when taking the lead on climate change can help China secure diplomatic currency on other issues such as disputed territory in the South China Sea.
These macro-level narratives often offer an analysis of what the decision is going to mean for a certain area. The previous example addressed consequences for diplomacy. We also see discussion of consequences for the economy. For instance, della Cava et al. in *USA Today* (2017) forecast that the decision may slow job losses in the oil sector but will likely not hinder the phasing out of coal in the long run as the technology becomes increasingly less competitive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper's country</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Other&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.11. Regions mentioned by the press of each country cited in each country (e.g. 5 of the 23 German articles, i.e. 38%, mentioned China)

At the other end of the spectrum, some narratives are hyper-localised. One article in the *New York Times* (Harmon, 2017) explores the implications for the teaching of climate science in schools of having a president who does not support climate policy. The article visits Wellston High School in Ohio, a “former coal and manufacture town seeking its next act” where most students live under the poverty line. It presents the conflict between biology teacher James Sutter, the first teacher in the school to include climate change in his curriculum, and “straight-A” student Gwen, who takes Sutter’s insistence on teaching his class about what she views to be a matter of opinion as a personal attack. During one lesson where Sutter shows his students a video featuring a Christian climate activist, Gwen flees the classroom. “It was just so biased toward saying climate change is real,” she explains later. “And that all these people that I pretty much am like are wrong and stupid.”

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<sup>12</sup> The “Other” category mainly includes Ireland and Australia, accounting for the international editions of certain newspapers such as *The Guardian*, as well as Italy, which issued a joint statement with France and Germany on June 2.
The article goes on to argue that climate scepticism has become a “proxy for conservative ideals of hard work, small government and what people call here ‘self-sustainability’”, citing the research on the political polarisation of climate change by Dan Kahan (2018). This article also mentions the Trump administration’s wider environmental policies, most notably the “huge layoffs” planned in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Such a narrative puts a very human face on the “victims” portrayed by Trump in his speech (the communities suffering from coal-mining related unemployment) and those portrayed by Macron (the scientists facing politicised resistance as well as decreased funding).

In between these macro and micro levels, a number of narratives focus on asking what the decision means for states, or cities, at what can be seen as an intermediate, “meso”, level.

Some of these narratives were invited directly by Trump’s speech, in which he said that he had been elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris. One New York Times article (Lyons et al., 2017) calls the comparison a “rusty metaphor” and interviews several Pittsburghers, who paint the vision of a city that is fully engaged in the Paris Agreement process. “It’s been a long time since the steel industry collapsed”, explains Sam Williamson, a labour organiser. “Pittsburghers have for a very long time – probably because of our early 20th-century history, which sticks in people’s minds – taken very seriously the challenges of maintaining a strong economy while not destroying our environment at the same time. Those two things are not irreconcilable.” Indeed, as Nuticelli (2017) describes in The Guardian, Pittsburgh was one of over two hundred cities and states to come together under the We Are Still In movement in the days following the announcement to declare their commitment to climate action.

Beyond editorials and opinion pieces reacting to the speech, some articles also demonstrate how Trump’s decision is having actionable consequences. An article in the Wall Street Journal (Spegele, 2017) reports on Californian Governor Jerry Brown’s visit to an international clean energy forum in China the week following the announcement. China “rolled out the red carpet” for Governor Brown, who was welcomed by President Xi Jinping to Beijing’s Great Hall of the People while “US Energy Secretary Rick Perry, also in town for the forum, was received by a vice premier”. California already had ambitious climate policies, the article points out, being the first American state to institute a carbon trading scheme, but the Trump announcement propelled it as an alternative actor on the international stage with whom other world leaders
could deal, announcing “plans to coordinate emission-reduction programs with China’s Ministry of Science and Technology and to set up a joint climate-research institute between California and China’s Tsinghua University.”

One of the guiding questions of this chapter was to assess the extent to which the narratives developed by the heads of states were picked up by their respective press. President Macron’s “Make The Planet Great Again” is the easiest one to track: of the six articles that mention it, two are from France, two from Germany and two from the United Kingdom, suggesting that, at least quantitatively, when it comes to issues of international policy, compelling stories get reported regardless of where they emerge (if they are assumed to be relevant to the issue as a whole). Looking more closely at the content of these narratives, however, it is interesting to notice that the French press is the only one to feature a climate scientist as their main character: where the *New York Times* gives an op-ed to the economist Paul Krugman (2017) and the *Telegraph* (2017) to former politician Nigel Lawson, *Libération* (Dorman and Massiot, 2017) features an interview with Valérie Masson-Delmotte, head of the IPCC’s Working Group 1 on Climate Science. Her story follows Macron’s, identifying science as a victim, with Trump’s policies being called “anti-science”. In the interview, Masson-Delmotte narrates a future in which the first consequence of the US pulling out of the Paris Agreement will be a cut in science funding in the US in general, and to the IPCC in particular, and identifies France as offering a “scientific asylum” to American researchers.

The sample also shows evidence of how domestic politics is affected by the event both in Germany and in the UK. In Germany, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (2017) reports on the publication of a white paper with “Trumpian airs” by a circle of right-wing CDU leaders. Federal elections in Germany were scheduled to take place in September of that year, and the local press was concerned to see how Trump’s electoral success was likely to affect German politics. In the UK, newspapers noted Theresa May’s lack of an official speech on the issue, as well as her failure to give her support to the joint statement issued by her French, German and Italian counterparts. *The Daily Mail* (Akbar and Sculthorpe, 2017) reported how the leader of the opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, condemned her silence, calling it a “dereliction of duty”. *The Guardian* published an opinion piece by Ed Davey (2017), former secretary of state for energy and climate change under David Cameron, who argued that the prime minister “fawned over” Trump, which hurt both the Paris Agreement and Britain’s diplomatic stance. This diversity of
characters is a reminder that events happening in climate policy can be relevant to narratives far outside its original realm.

3.2.3 Trump as a hero or a villain?

In the process of asking “what does this mean?”, we inevitably have to include some judgement about whether the event whose consequences we are examining was a positive or a negative one. The first step is to look at plot type. “Stymied progress”, i.e. a plot structure where things are temporarily disturbed, but end in overall progress, is the most frequent (see Fig 3.9). Depending on how the article is framed, however, opposite events can have the same plot type. For example, a story may follow a “Decline” structure caused by the US entering the Paris Agreement (as in Trump’s speech) or by the US leaving the Paris Agreement (e.g. one Libération (Pattée, 2017) article argues that the US stands to “lose everything” by leaving). This indicator alone is therefore not enough to generalise about whether leaving the Agreement is seen as a good or a bad thing.

![Figure 3.9. Split of plot type in the sample](image-url)

One way to delve deeper into how the event is assessed is to look at how Trump himself is characterised. In the sample overall, Trump is portrayed in 34% of articles as a villain, and 10% as a hero (meaning that in over half of the articles he cannot be identified as either). In the six articles of the sample from right-wing media, he is never portrayed as a villain but in every other category he is more often a villain than a hero (see Figure 3.10).
In terms of moral judgement, however, a closer look at this data raises some questions. Nine articles present Donald Trump as the main hero of the story (with a further three where he is part of a group of heroes, with other members of his administration). There is, however, an even split in plot types among these stories, as shown in Figure 3.11 (with two or three articles for “Stymied progress”, “Decline”, “Change is an illusion” and “Conspiracy”, and none for the last two categories). When he is classified as a hero in a “Decline”, or “Conspiracy” story, this reflects his structural role, as the protagonist of the story, rather than informs us on his moral standing. For example, Spegele (2017) writing in the Wall Street Journal argues that the decision will make it harder for the United States to enter international agreements in the future, and will give China an economic advantage. Trump is the hero of this story because it is his deliberation and ultimate decision that is at the centre, but the outcome implies the author sees his actions in a negative light.
The causal mechanism indicator helps us dig into the portrayal of Trump’s character further. If the causal mechanism is coded as “intentional”, it means that the outcome of the narrative is the one that was originally intended. If it is coded as “inadvertent”, the outcome is different from what was intended (or an unexpected side-effect of the event). As shown in Figure 3.12, when Trump is portrayed as a hero, the causal mechanism is more often intentional than inadvertent, suggesting that if the narrative portrays Trump as making the right decision, then the outcome that is presented matches what Trump intends. For example, Christopher Booker (2017) writes in *The Sunday Telegraph* that Trump had rightly identified that the Paris Agreement was a “fraudulent deal” that would commit the US to paying “by far the highest economic price in terms of money and lost jobs for a deal whereby China, India and the rest would take America’s money but carry on emitting CO₂ just as before,” and that, furthermore, exiting the deal wouldn’t affect climate change because the “people who are now waxing so angry have been looking in the wrong place for what drives the climate all along.” (He does not, incidentally, bother to offer an explanation of where the “right” place might be.)

When Trump is portrayed as a villain however, the causal mechanism is more often inadvertent, suggesting that the negative things that happen were not explicitly intended. In other words, he is not always portrayed as being intentionally villainous. For example, both *Le Monde* (Roger, 2017) and *Die Welt* (Knäble, 2017) deplore the decision while making the case that one unintended consequence of the announcement is that it gives Macron a strategic advantage.
advantage as an international leader on climate change, helping him to attract high-level scientists and entrepreneurs to work in France.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intentional</th>
<th>Inadvertent</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donald Trump: hero</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald Trump: villain</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.12. Cross-references of character type and causal mechanism (e.g. 24% of articles where Trump is the villain show the event as being intentional)

This idea of Trump as an “unintended villain” is consistent with the picture provided by both the Pew Center and Harvard Kennedy School studies presented above of Trump’s presidency being an unusual one. This president was treated with an unusual amount of scrutiny, resulting not only in an unusual number of negative comments, but also in comments that do not grant Trump intentionality (Mitchell et al., 2017; Patterson, 2017).

This unusual presidency and the resulting amount of press scrutiny is perhaps best summed up by comedian John Mulaney (2018) in his stand-up act Kid Gorgeous:

This guy being the president, it’s like there’s a horse loose in a hospital. I think eventually everything’s going to be OK, but I have no idea what’s going to happen next. And neither do any of you, and neither do your parents, because there’s a horse loose in the hospital. That’s never happened before! No one knows what the horse is going to do next, least of all the horse. He’s never been in the hospital before, he’s just as confused as you are. [...] When people say ‘How come you were never mad at the last guy?’ I say ‘because I wasn’t paying attention. I used to pay less attention before it was a horse.

In the following section, we see how this affects the articles that are dedicated to shedding light on the policy-making process.

But this does raise some questions on what we understand exactly here by villain. The category is indeed ill able to capture the difference between whether the character is a villain because his actions hinders the progress of the hero (a villain in the “functional” sense, which can be done on purpose or inadvertently), or because his actions are intended to have a negative outcome (a villain in the “moral” sense, which clear intention on the part of the character). Chapter 5 will examine this distinction further.
3.2.4 How the sausage gets made

The other large subset of narratives found in the sample were focused around understanding why Trump had taken that particular decision, and what were the steps that were taken to arrive at this announcement. In other words, these are stories concerned with the making of the metaphorical “sausage” of politics.

In terms of characters, we see here Trump being a hero who is weighed one way or another by allies or villains, depending on whether the author deems that the decision is a good or a bad one.

These reports portray this deliberation with various levels of hesitation. Susan Archer (2017) in *The New York Times*, Parker et al. (2017) in *The Washington Post*, Laure Mandeville (2017) in *Le Figaro* and Julian Dorn (2017) in *Die Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* all report a fairly balanced debate between advisers trying to convince Trump to stay in the Agreement, and those who eventually convinced him to leave. On the “remain” side are Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Director of the National Economic Council Gary Cohn, and Trump’s daughter Ivanka Trump who “fought to make sure that her father heard from people supportive of the agreement, setting up calls and meetings with world leaders, corporate executives and others” (Archer, 2017). Among the world leaders are Macron, Merkel and May who are all said to have had calls with Trump, as well as the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The corporate executives include Disney’s Robert Iger and Tesla’s Elon Musk, who had both announced they would quit a presidential business advisory board if Trump were to leave (and both followed through).

Eventually though, the other side – headed by White House advisor Stephen Bannon, head of the EPA Scott Pruitt, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell – won, with Trump ending up “back to where he’d been” (Parker et al., 2017). Parker et al. go on to argue that the discussions the president had with foreign leaders “backfired”, with “one senior White House official characteriz[ing] disappointing European allies as ‘a secondary benefit’ of Trump’s decision to withdraw.”

By contrast, some articles argue that there was never much of a debate at all. Ban Balz (2017), for example, argues in the *Washington Post* that the president is above all driven by a “belief that others have taken advantage of the United States and that he alone will stop it” and that
his views on core issues are “consistent and long-standing”. They are “viscerally expressed, not intellectually argued, but it has always seemed clear that they are deeply and genuinely felt.” Such views are unlikely to be changed by rational arguments one way or another. This is underpinned by speculation around whether Donald Trump still believes that climate change isn’t real (Alexander, 2017), as he had expressed repeatedly on Twitter before being elected, most famously tweeting in 2012 that: “The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive” (Matthews, 2017).

This takes us back to Mulaney’s horse metaphor: if you believe that the president makes decisions “viscerally”, driven by feeling rather than rational arguments, then it becomes important to understand how these feelings work. In an opinion piece in The New York Times, Maureen Dowd (2017) argues that “the more he is labelled a boor and a brute by his critics at home and abroad, the more Trump digs in.” She justifies this view by telling an anecdote published by Trump’s biographer Tim O’Brien, who claims that the president “once pointed out a dozen six-foot-high speakers by the pool at Mar-a-Lago [his private golf resort] blasting classic rock and said: ‘You know, when I moved here to Palm Beach, nobody wanted me around. And I love cranking this music as loud as I can because it bugs the heck out of all of these so-and-sos and I love it.’”

Writing for the Washington Post, Dino Grandoni (2017) goes even further in speculating that the decision may have been made on a whim because the president felt provoked. “The coup de grâce may have come from the new French president, Emmanuel Macron,” he explains.

Macron was quoted in a French journal talking about his white-knuckled handshake with Trump at their first meeting in Brussels, where the newly elected French president gripped Trump’s hand tightly and would not let go for six long seconds in a show of alpha-male fortitude. ... He likened Trump to a pair of authoritarian strongmen – Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – and said that he was purposefully forceful because he believed his encounter with Trump was ‘a moment of truth.’ Hearing smack-talk from the Frenchman 31 years his junior irritated and bewildered Trump, aides said. (Grandoni, 2017)

Foster et al. (2017) at The Daily Telegraph also reported this anecdote. This again is consistent with the scrutiny and emphasis on Trump’s personality and fitness for office that Patterson et al. (2017) found in the press coverage of his presidency in general.
Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have explored how looking at political texts through a narrative lens can help us unpick how politicians attempt to persuade their audience that they have rightly identified problems and are taking the right steps to solve them. Trump’s announcement that he wanted the United States to leave the Paris Agreement was a particularly interesting event to look at because it was a radical change of direction for the country’s foreign policy and forced its allies to revise the existing narratives of their own involvements in international climate policy. Analysing plot and characters allowed me to unpick the different ways in which Merkel and Macron’s speeches were structured to serve different purposes in spite of a discourse that on the surface shared many of the same components.

Applying a similar approach to the press coverage of the event highlighted two trends in terms of the types of stories portrayed in the media, both through expositions of their decision-making process, and discussions of the broader context of individual events. Studying Donald Trump as a character in these narratives allows me to go beyond framing analysis to consider his position as a hero, a villain, or something in between. In particular, it highlighted the fact that the notion of ‘hero’ could muddle the functional role of a character with the moral judgement assigned to them. I return to this question in Chapter 5.

Finally, looking at narratives shed some light on the architecture of the global climate governance structure. With nation states clearly seen as the main players, the US stepping down created a vacuum. Some responses assumed a simple substitution of narrative agency by replacing one nation state leader for another (China or France). Others filled that vacuum by bringing to the fore stories about other types of leaders, including the creation of the We Are Still In movement that committed American states, cities, businesses and NGOs to uphold their part of the Paris Agreement, each developing their own narrative as climate change allies. The multiplication of protagonists in these narratives point to a change in direction in global climate governance, echoed in the literature, notably in Bulkeley et al. (2018). This is an idea to which I will return in later chapters.

These media narratives functioned very much at a macro level, in NPF terms, manifesting at the national or international level. I turn in the next chapter to examining how these macro
narratives fit in with the more micro stories of those directly involved in making international climate policy, as they shared them in the halls of the UNFCCC at the next Conference of the Parties that was held six months after Trump’s announcement in Bonn, Germany.
Chapter 4 — Personal, Organisational, and Institutional Narratives at COP23

In the previous chapter, I have looked at how a particular policy event disrupted the media narratives used to describe the international climate policy regime. I presented a set of external narratives, produced by the printed press of four countries. In this chapter, I dig deeper into international policy narratives, turning to the internal narratives produced by the actors who engage with the UNFCCC. To this end, I have conducted a series of interviews with delegates of COP23, which took place in Bonn, Germany in November 2017.

As discussed in Chapter 1, narratives can be used to explain a range of different phenomena, from anecdotes of one’s personal life story to histories of a whole country, region, or even the world. It follows that people will tell different stories based on the level at which they have been invited to comment. In the following, I present sets of narratives that operate at two levels: the individual and the institutional. Figure 4.1 presents a simplified ecology of how these different levels are articulated. This chapter looks at the individual level shown in grey.

At the individual level, I wanted to look at how stories drive people to become involved in climate negotiations. If climate change is “plastic” as a concept (Hulme, 2009), what different meanings does it hold to climate negotiators? And what does this tell us about how they view the UNFCCC? This question also helps to understand how organisations see the roles they play within the process, in line with the Advocacy Coalition Framework’s (Weible and Sabatier, 2007) understanding of how different actors group themselves around shared belief systems. In this context, the narratives that actors tell about the negotiation process help to solidify their beliefs, and by interrogating these we can therefore see affinities between positions, or, conversely, expose a clash of visions.

At the institutional level, I was interested in two kinds of stories: those that explained how international climate agreements, and in particular the Paris Agreement, worked, and those that explained how they were negotiated. This in turn helps to shed light on what roles actors perceived the UNFCCC as a whole to play within the broader climate regime, especially as a “signalling” agent to the rest of the world. Through this system of signalling, I argue that
climate agreements themselves have the power to frame which stories get told about climate change.

Finally, I examine the interaction between the UNFCCC as an institution and the media, using the same example as the last chapter of Trump’s announcement that the United States was to leave the Paris Agreement. I find that there appears to be a disconnect here, because the media narratives tend to operate on a much shorter timeframe, with this announcement being perceived as a major disruptive event. Those working within the institution have a longer-term vision of the issue, and see the event as part of a longer story consisting of many disruptions. This in turn enables me to reflect on the power of selective appropriation as theorized by Somers (1994).

Throughout the chapter, one should bear in mind that over the course of the interviews, most of the answers were not told to me in narrative form. This is because people don’t always talk in narrative form, especially when discussing complex issues, even though what they say and how they conceptualise an issue may nonetheless be underpinned by a narratival interpretative framework. I therefore strived to extract narrative elements from discourse.
that was most often structured as an argument. Such elements included mentions of events linked together by causality, a sense of time progression and scale, as well as characters.

I conducted 21 interviews between November 2017 and January 2018 with attendees of COP23, from both Parties (i.e. countries and groups of countries\(^\text{13}\) who are part of the UNFCCC) and non-Parties (any other organisation). All regions were represented apart from South America, as well as most constituencies (Parties, local government, environmental NGOs, research organisations, gender organisations, indigenous people organisations, and business). Interviewees ranged in experience from being first time attendants of COP to having participated in the meetings for over twenty years. To preserve the anonymity of interviewees, they will be referred to in this chapter by their region and organisation type. Appendix 4 provides a full breakdown. All but one of these interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, one participant preferring for me to take notes as we spoke.

To select participants, I first created an extensive list of delegation points of contact from the UNFCCC website, and reached out via email, scheduling some meetings on site, and others for the following week as I knew their schedules were likely to be packed, and having to change at the last minute throughout the two weeks. When on site, I attended a variety of side events with a view to capturing the diversity of participants attending, and approaching speakers at the end of their panels. This was particularly successful for non-Party participants, as an extensive list of attendees was not available in advance. For the rest I used a snowballing approach, asking interviewees at the end of our conversations if they had any colleagues to whom I could be introduced. This was particularly effective for approaching the Fijian delegation, who held the presidency for this COP, as I was able to approach high-ranking officials through a series of conversations with more junior colleagues. The interviews themselves varied in length thanks to the semi-formal structure I adopted. The shortest were around 15 minutes, the time I took to ask the ten questions listed in my interview protocol (see Appendix 5). The longest were closer to 45 minutes, where I took the opportunity to ask some of the more engaged interviewees more general questions about the UNFCCC, the proceedings of that particular COP, as well as their personal backgrounds. I used the software

\(^{13}\) E.g. the European Union, the Arab Group.
NVivo to transcribe the interviews, coding them for themes. Ethical approval for this research was granted by Imperial College London’s Science Engineering and Technology Ethics Committee.

4.1. Personal narratives: motivation and belief

In chapter 1, I presented some of the literature that sees narrative as the main process by which humans build their identity (e.g. in Ricoeur, 1991). This body of research holds that we pick and choose from the multitude of events we experience to construct coherent stories about who we are, where we come from, why we act; to imbue meaning to our lives, through the process of “emplotment” (Somers, 1994). In order to gather a full picture of the narratives that govern how COPs function, it therefore is important to consider how those individuals who participate in the negotiations see themselves within the process.

To this end, I asked two different questions of all the interviewees: what their personal motivation for joining their organisation or delegation was, and whether they could recall a specific event in their lives that helped them to forge those convictions. This second question was designed to prompt stories from interviewees. I was aware that people do not always adopt a narrative form when they speak, especially on formal topics, and I wanted to give them the opportunity to explicitly share stories with me. The answers revealed four different visions of climate change policy: one of intellectual challenge, one of moral duty, one of response to a threat, and one of political instrumentalism. These are not mutually exclusive, of course and some interviewees referred to several of these visions.

4.1.1 Climate change as intellectual challenge

Eight interviewees said their motivation came from the intellectual challenge presented by climate change. Four referred specifically to becoming interested by learning about it at university. They were attracted to its multidisciplinarity, “at the intersection of economics and the environment” for example, or how it required one to have a “bird’s eye view of many interlinked topics.” They had identified that climate change was a “problem”, and “wanted to be part of the solution”. Interestingly, two interviewees had studied the same topic – the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) – but arrived at different conclusions, and this reflected their current position. One member of a Party delegation explained that they
“thought that it was a very clever way to deal with the issue of climate change.” “I was more fascinated with the concept of that as a solution to the problem, than motivated by a strong commitment to environmentalism,” they continued. A policy analyst from an environmental NGO also had lectures on the CDM at university, but “found it illogical”. They now advocated to avoid having such a system implemented under the Paris Agreement, as in her view, it gave developed countries a “free pass” to pollute since they could buy emission reductions from others instead of decreasing their own emissions.

One interviewee stood out for the source of the knowledge that was driving their motivation. “A friend messaged me a video on Facebook” about producing energy from “old nuclear waste and weapons”. The interviewee was captivated by the idea, “fell down the rabbit hole” and quit their job to found a grassroots organisation promoting nuclear energy.

Only one developing country interviewee shared with me a classroom experience of climate change. They had studied development in India and Germany, but it was their work on the ground on a menstruation program for women in rural areas that served as an “entry point to how wicked problems have global consequences.” In other words, they approached climate change from an intellectual point of view, but conceptualised it in a way that was consistent with their lived experience.

4.1.2 Climate change as moral calling

Another recurring theme for explaining why interviewees worked in climate change policy was that of feeling a “moral duty” to do so.

This moral duty was instilled in them in different ways: through their family, with one interviewee explaining that they “grew up assuming that this is what you needed to do,” and when they saw that it wasn’t happening, they “jumped in to do their part”; through their school, with one interviewee saying they were “educated to care” from a young age, while another described their memory of planting a tree in the schoolyard each Arbor Day; and through their religious belief, with one interviewee noting that the Encyclical on the Environment issued by Pope Francis (2015) had been a “real call [...] to care for the world that we have been given and our brothers and sisters who live in it”.

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This last quote also shows that this sense of moral duty was directed both at protecting the environment and protecting people. Indeed, this interviewee came to climate policy from a background in human rights law, which they had worked on because they felt “the urgency that I feel of protecting the most vulnerable people.” Protecting people also meant caring about the world they wanted to leave for their children.

Again, these interviewees all came from developed countries. Most could not recall a specific catalysing event in their life, but rather spoke of a conviction that had been built over time. One interviewee even pointed out that specific weather events had not actually influenced much their thinking: “I’ve been in areas that are subject to floods, in other areas that are subjects to droughts, but we weren’t talking about climate change when those occurred.” This is consistent with the literature on perception of climate change following natural disasters (Marshall, 2015).

4.1.3 Climate change as threat

Both the attraction to an intellectual challenge, and the appeals to morality came in stark contrast with some of the experiences of other interviewees, especially from developing countries. “Climate change is a daily matter when you come where I come from,” explained a delegate from Mali. Floods are now a yearly occurrence in the capital city of Bamako, with serious threat posed to food security. Another delegate from China noted that temperatures were rising there to a “dangerous” level. While they reported having witnessed recent changes in their environment, others spoke of a transformation on a longer timeframe. One Moroccan delegate had studied rainfall in their country since the 1980s after having noticed an increase in droughts in rural areas. They asserted that impacts could be seen in Morocco since the 1970s. A Fijian delegate spoke of having witnessed sea level rise since the 1960s.

The only interviewee from a developed country who reported a similar experience was a Canadian First Nation Chief. He, too, had seen impacts in his region since the 1970s. Specifically, his community had witnessed a change in the wind patterns on the Great Slave Lake, in the Northern Territories. He spoke of the struggle to “make people realize climate change was real,” because their ways of knowing did not fit in the Western scientific tradition:
Our people know a lot about those sorts of things. And they don’t know what to term it so they call it traditional knowledge. For example, our legends tell us that there are winds which go back to what we call the beginning of time. And we know that there’s a number of sets of winds going up into the atmosphere. And the Western world only really found out when they sent the missions to the Moon in ’69. So they confirmed what we’ve always known.

He and other indigenous leaders were engaged in a campaign to have their “voice represented in the Framework [of the Convention],” to have both their knowledge and their rights recognized, which ties into the next facet of these personal narratives.

4.1.4 Climate change as politics

The Canadian Chief explained that his actions were motivated by a need to have indigenous people represented on the international stage in general, because their forms of government existed outside of the framework of nation states, and national governments did not have the mandate to represent them. There was, in other words, a strong political dimension to his personal narrative of engagement, since it questioned the very set up of the United Nations regime of having nation-states as the appropriate actors to represent the people.

The interviewee from the Middle East held a view that also stood out. In their view, climate change was “an economic challenge framed as an environmental challenge.” It was a tool for different countries to push their own economic agenda. “In Germany, it is about renewables, in France it is about nuclear, and in the US it is about clean fossil fuel.” He went on to suggest that Western countries were funding NGOs to be critical against his government’s policies in this country to defend these economic interests. In this light, climate negotiations were the stage of a political struggle.

4.1.5 Emploting events of different scales

Somers (1994) calls “emplotment” the act of selecting and connecting events we have experienced in a cohesive manner so as to give them meaning. It is this emplotment, as well as the use of personified characters, that gives narrativity to a form of discourse and
distinguishes it from pure description. The US Mayor stood out amongst Westerners in sharing a rich narrative with multiple episodes, perhaps unsurprisingly given his political role.

Every Arbor Day we would go outside and plant a tree at my school. And by the second or third grade it kinda became instilled upon me that this meant more than just planting a tree. [...] About two or three years later with my grandfather, saving a pear tree in our backyard after it had been struck by lightning. Again had this connection. And then in college, interning on Capitol Hill, and attending the hearings on ANWR [Arctic Refuge drilling controversy] when the first drilling was occurring in Alaska on Native American land. By 1990 I had become a member of the Sierra Club.

This story includes many of the elements I have mentioned, with learning from lived experienced in school as well as with family from a young age, to later making a more conceptual connection with policy. This is a connection from the experiential to the conceptual, as well as a connection of different scales: from his small backyard to the great expanse of Alaskan native land. Others spoke of their connection to Nature as a proxy for feeling connected to climate change, with two different interviewees giving alpine examples. One said, “I think that there is something about the perspective you get from being on top of a mountain and looking out across your surroundings that is very humbling, but also appreciative of the planet.” This tension between the small scale of one’s personal narrative and the large, planetary scale of climate change is one that is hard to reconcile, and speaks to the challenge of relating compelling stories of climate change. Indeed, many spoke of the large scale without making an explicit connection to the small, speaking of having “entered the Anthropocene”, of climate change being a “huge existential issue for mankind” that is making the world “more and more dangerous”.

In summary, there is a clear divide between interviewees from developed and developing countries on how they perceive climate change. All but one of the interviewees from developing countries spoke of having personally experienced adverse weather effects, while for interviewees from developed countries, climate change was an abstract concept they had learned about in class or through the news.
4.2. Institutional narratives on the Paris Agreement

The second set of narratives I was interested to hear about was those institutional stories told to explain both the purpose of the Paris Agreement and how it works. To this end, I asked questions related to how the delegates believed the negotiations were going, as well as whether they had seen a change in how the UNFCCC operated since Paris. I draw here on the body of work on organisational culture which highlights that individual narratives should be understood as part of the organisation to which they belong, especially when they tell narratives about these organisations. Hoffman (2001), traces for example the evolution of corporate environmentalism in the United States between 1970 and 1993. To fully understand it, he argues, three aspects must be taken into account: the actors who occupy what he calls the “organisational field” (here COP participants), the “dominant industry perspective and norms” (here the dominant narrative described in Chapter 2), and the “internal culture of the [corporate] organisation”, (p.7) to which I now turn.

4.2.1 The paradigm shift of the Paris Agreement

The majority of responses I gathered confirmed that what occurred in Paris in 2015 was a paradigm shift in climate policy, as already touched on in Chapter 2. It centred around two innovations: the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the increased involvement of non-Parties in UN-led climate action. These two elements were brought up time and again by interviewees, with the idea of a turning point at the centre of what emerged to be a widely accepted institutional narrative for the UNFCCC. In this, COP21 in Paris was seen as a disruptive moment where actors had successfully overcome past challenges, setting them on a new path towards the successful achievement of their goals. This section summarizes the arguments brought forward to explain the significance of this turning point.

As discussed in Chapter 2, under the Kyoto Protocol, a clear division was made between developed and developing countries. Developed countries had emission reduction targets imposed on them, while it was understood that for the most part developing countries should focus on adaptation. The two sides of this international climate policy coin were connected by the Clean Development Mechanism: a market where emissions reductions could be traded between developed and developing countries. Thus a developed country could choose to not
reduce emissions at home, but rather to buy carbon credits from a developing country that had implemented a carbon-friendly project. The NDC system changed that, with every party having to submit both mitigation and adaptation plans as they deemed appropriate, regardless of their development level.

Marshall (2015) argued that one of the reasons the Kyoto Protocol failed was because it was modelled after the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and set a timetable for mutually verifiable reductions, in emissions for Kyoto and nuclear warheads for START. This was built from the belief that mutual pressure would get governments to act. This failed to take into account the fact that the balance of power was far less stable in the case of Kyoto than it had been for START: the two equally-matched giants of the Cold War could easily exert pressure on each other to take similar levels of action. In the case of climate change, those who had most to reduce were also those with most power, and the developing nations who were suffering most from the impact had very little recourse to ensure the schedule was met. This disconnect between domestic interests of the powerful parties (developed countries not wanting to reduce emissions if it harms their economies) and the international interest of the collective (reducing emissions overall) echoes the realist reading of the connection between domestic and international power relations as theorised by Putnam (1988).

The NDCs, as they were presented to me by multiple interviewees, were designed to account for this imbalance of power. It is much easier to agree to set one’s own targets than to stick to a schedule determined by others. At the same time, its cyclical nature (with NDCs needing to be submitted every five years) prompts Parties to keep having to present the results they have achieved and commit to new targets, offering opportunities for other countries and civil society to keep up the pressure. One interviewee who witnessed the failure of the Kyoto Protocol and the crafting of the Paris Agreement, argued that this new set up was “not so much about meeting a particular commitment, as constantly getting countries to take action.”

Along with assuming a balanced distribution of power between those committing to reduce emissions and those enforcing them, the Kyoto Protocol also assumed that the only characters in the climate action stories were nation states. Under Paris, the main characters are still states, but more actors are invited to join. There is an acknowledgement that government action alone is not enough to bring about the profound economic, social, and cultural
transformation entailed by a drastic reduction in GHG emissions. This broadened the scope of the institutional narrative, adding complexity, but also reinforcing the sense that all these different characters were working together as allies towards a common goal – to mitigate and adapt to climate change – rather than seeing different interest groups fighting for parts of the same pie. The Fijian delegation repeated time and again that we were “all in one canoe” as a metaphor to advocate for collaboration, rather than conflict.

The Marrakesh Partnership (UNFCCC, 2016) set up during COP22 was designed to increase engagement between Parties and non-Parties, so that government policies can be effectively matched with societal expectations. This further enshrined the legitimacy of these new actors within the UNFCCC narrative. At COP23, a further Open Dialogue was launched to officially invite individual non-Party organisations to formally engage with Parties and provide input on certain agenda points.

That is not to say that everyone agreed on every aspect of the story. One non-Party interviewee who participated saw the dialogue as an opportunity for civil society to “step up their game and be very strategic.” They surmised that there was a chance to break away from the formality of plenary session statements, which are very codified in the way constituencies can express themselves, and exert more explicit pressure on Parties: “maybe we can be a little political, a little unpleasant,” they said, “we don’t always have to congratulate each other.” By contrast, a Party interviewee who was also present at the Dialogue expressed some concerns that opening the door to non-Parties too widely could give too much of a platform to, as they put it, “those actors who are not pro-climate action.” As a member of a delegation that was pushing for ambitious action, they were worried that such a dialogue could be overtaken by lobbyists who had historically been active in attempting to slow down negotiations, such as members of the oil and gas industry.

Overall, there was some uncertainty as to what engagement of non-Party actors would and should look like. Some advocated for more “institutionalisation at the UNFCCC level”, while others were not yet convinced that those non-Party voices were actually taken into account and could influence negotiations in a meaningful way. The next step of this engagement took the form of the Talanoa Dialogue, a year-long initiative that will be explored in more detail in the following two chapters.
Finally, one interviewee remarked that the Paris Agreement brought a change in the international climate narrative in terms of the direction of the plot. Whereas before, the story had mainly been one of decline, or “we’re all going to die”, as they put it, efforts had been made to design a system that produced “solutions-oriented”, positive stories. This is true of the Marrakesh Partnership that champions solutions from the private sector, as well as the stocktaking exercise that eventually became the Talanoa Dialogue.

Thus emerged a new narrative, broader in its range of characters and more oriented towards positive progress towards a common goal. While it was accepted by all Parties who signed the Agreement, previous concepts were not completely abandoned. As we will see in the next chapter, crucial issues regarding historical responsibility and the concept of “common but differentiated responsibility” (CBDR) are still very much on the table for a number of developing countries, led by the Arab Group.

4.2.2 The room where it happens

I was also interested in how actors understand the role of international negotiations and their place within it. The most common theme that was repeated by interviewees when asked to explain the role of international negotiations was that of sending signals. “One of the main reasons why real world change is happening is because of both what we have agreed, but really importantly, the signals that we send, what we are intending to agree,” explained a negotiator. Another negotiator emphasized the connection between the international and the domestic: “it drives countries to go home and ensure that they have a tracking system for national emissions, to ensure that they have national adaptation planning processes in place, it gives them a hook, to then go home and make policy”. In this light, the purpose of international agreements is therefore to provide a common blueprint for how policy can be developed at home, without prescribing one particular policy option over another.

Interviewees also echoed the idea of nation states being only one type among many actors in the climate regime. This was consistent with the several media narratives which highlighted the growing role of non-state actors I described in Chapter 3, as well as the broadening of the scope of the UNFCCC institutional narratives discussed in the previous section. “Agreements give a signal, but they are not the whole story,” said one. Another explained that it provided
a way to gather the necessary “political will”, but that successful climate action needed to have “several elements moving at the same time”. They were not the only person pointing to the complexity of the task at hand, with one interviewee from a research organisation calling it the “biggest experiment the world has had in global governance”. Indeed, many cited the challenges of creating the right conditions “for everyone to have the same vision of what is possible”.

But there was also an awareness that the COP had “taken on a life of its own”, after over twenty years of negotiations. One the one hand, this was seen as positive, with several interviewees confiding that they attended COPs not only to follow negotiations, but also to conduct business, as it was the one time a year when a lot of their collaborators found themselves in the same place. On the other hand, there was also an awareness of the limits of having the event grow to such a scale. For example, even though Fiji held the Presidency in 2018, the event was actually held in Germany, because the Pacific island did not have the logistical capacity to host it. Two separate interviewees deplored this, with one person working in Thailand pointing out the irony of having a “Pacific COP” that was in effect inaccessible to a lot of Pacific people. The “trade fair” aspect also seemed to bother some participants. One interviewee described it as a “multi-lateral industrial complex”: “there’s a lot of people that have careers around this,” they acknowledged, “and who are invested in continuing to have careers”.

The interviewee from the Gender constituency stood out in their perception of the role of COP: “I really don’t know what cooperation means”, they explained. “We have made it so difficult to cooperate with all those divisions between sectors.” Instead, they advocated for a better consideration of the “humane” aspect of climate change, pointing to the “real problem of climate refugees”.

They spoke of the divide between developed and developing countries that is summarised in UNFCCC language under the umbrella of “historical responsibility”. It means that even though some developed countries may now be emitting less than large developing countries, they have been emitting for longer, and this difference in cumulative emissions needs to be taken into account. But there was another dimension to historical

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14 At the time climate refugees did not yet have an official status (UNHCR, 2019).
responsibility that the Gender delegate claimed brought up a deeper divide between developed and developing countries that was in their view insurmountable: “the colonial powers really have to give back,” they said. In this light, climate negotiations were but one small part of the broader story of countries seeking reparations for the harms caused by colonialism.

4.2.3 Communicating the institutional narrative

It is interesting to note that Party delegates, in explaining how they perceived the COP process, also discussed how they tried to communicate it to a broader public. If the goal was indeed to “send a signal” to the world, then it is important to reflect on what kind of signal was sent, and how best to do it. Two interviewees in particular were keen to discuss the concept of narrative, as this was something they grappled with themselves. They noted another change in the proceedings of negotiations since Paris: the increased media attention the event now attracted. When before, the process had been cyclical, with larger COPs like Kyoto (in 1997) or Copenhagen (in 2009) garnering much attention but the rest being left mostly to technical negotiators to agree on finer points and details, “people now expect every COP to be a big COP,” they explained.

In fact, with an agenda focused on agreeing on the finer rules of how to account for emissions reduction, what counts as climate finance or possible market mechanisms to achieve Paris goals, coupled with the fact that the deadline to agree on many of those rules was only set for the following year, little visible progress was made. “In some places, you have to look quite hard” in session notes to find any kind of progress at all, making it difficult to convey a compelling story to the media. “It’s not as sexy as signing the Paris Agreement,” they summarized. This relates to Somers’ notion of selective appropriation. Telling these stories is hard because the complex interlinking and distributed timeframes makes the selection of story elements difficult.

There was also an awareness that the culture of COPs has been refined over the years, making it difficult to access for outsiders. This, too, makes for a process difficult to narrate. One interviewee remarked that the UNFCCC had a vocabulary of its own, which could easily lead
to the use of opaque phrases such as “we’re going to hold an informal informal to write a non-paper.”

Walsh (2013), commenting on the role of IPCC scientists as communicators, observed a similar level of reflexivity. She noted how “astute the IPCC has become regarding the media construction of its ethos, and how actively it now manages it” (p.163). Ethos, here should be taken in the Aristotelian rhetoric sense of drawing one’s persuasion power from their place of authority as experts. In other words, IPCC scientists, like UNFCCC negotiators, are aware that the co-creating role they play in forming narratives that will be told by external observers about their institution.

In summary, there is a clear interaction between institutional and media narratives. On the one hand, institutional narratives inform how the media perceives climate policy; the themes of renewed determination and introduction of the new subnational actors picked up by the press clearly aligned with how negotiators perceived the fallout of the Trump announcement. On the other hand, media attention brings with it certain expectations that lead the delegates to work not only on getting results consistent with their national priorities, but also on getting results that can be easily narrated to public audiences.
Finally, I wanted to look deeper at this interaction between policymakers and the media. To do this, I asked the interviewees whether the Trump announcement had affected their work, with the view to assessing the extent to which their answers were consistent with the dominant media narratives on the topic.

In Chapter 3, I showed how the Trump announcement was portrayed in the media as a significant disruptive event. Most media narratives started with countries coming together to sign the Paris Agreement, and the announcement was a setback, but with two positive outcomes. The first one was the “renewed determination” of other Parties to make the Paris Agreement a success, while the second was the increased engagement of local actors and civil society in the United States to “step up” and fill the gap created by the change in federal policy.

It is worth at this stage providing some background on COP23. Firstly, it is important to understand that a COP operates on two levels: the first, official level, is the formal negotiations between Party delegations. Some of these are open for non-Parties to observe, while “informal”, closed door meetings also take place for negotiators to discuss finer points before they bring their position to the formal negotiations. The second level is what one interviewee described as a “climate trade fair”; Parties and International Organisations showcase their climate-related activities at booths in a great hall, while a series of side events are held, mostly taking the form of discussion panels. At COP23, this divide was heightened by logistical constraints, with the “trade fair” part of the conference being located twenty minutes away from the main venue and many non-Party attendants having access only to this remote part. Secondly, to understand how interviewees responded to my question on whether the Trump announcement had affected their work at the conference, it is important to give some context of the official US presence at the event itself. The official delegation was much smaller than in previous years, but it does not mean that they were completely absent. Indeed, as I’ve mentioned in the previous chapter, the Paris Agreement did not come into effect until 2020, coinciding with the next presidential election. As one member of the US delegation explained to me, they were still working on defending their interests within the negotiations. “The President left open the option of re-engaging under different terms,” they explained, “so
that’s why we continue to engage in the negotiations, because if we do end up being party of the Paris Agreement later on we would need the rules to reflect our interests.”

They were therefore present, but not in the leadership position they had assumed under the Obama administration. On the “trade fair” side, the most notable difference was the absence of an official US pavilion. In its stead, a “US Climate Action Center” was erected outside of the main conference venue, under the leadership of subnational governments and large environmental NGOs. It hosted a number of events with state governors, mayors and representatives from both business and NGOs to communicate the overarching message “We Are Still In”.

Figure 4.2. US Climate Action Center Tent outside the main building of COP 23 (picture by author)

4.3.1 Reinforced determination and local actors “stepping up”

In light of these developments, the media narrative outlined above, of renewed determination and increased involvement of subnational actors, was related in part or in full by seven of the
interviewees. Five of those were from organisations that operate in the United States, and two from European Party delegations. Two in particular were involved directly with the We Are Still In initiative put together to demonstrate the engagement of subnational government and civil society. One was the Mayor of a US city whose only previous COP had been Paris, and the other worked for a State Governor. Both confirmed that they would not have been present if not for the announcement, as the official agenda for this COP was otherwise highly technical (for Parties to agree on the “Paris Rulebook” of implementation).

Other US interviewees confirmed that their government or organisation had seen the move as a setback, but it had reinforced their determination to act, as much was still yet to be achieved outside of the United States also. As one programme officer put it, “the US pulling out is a moral failure, but [our organisation] is global, and we have been pushing well before the COP to make sure no other countries use the announcement as an excuse to weaken their own commitments or to leave the agreement themselves.”

4.3.2 Difference between dramatic political move and actual limited consequences on the ground

For the most part, interviewees declared having not felt an impact from the announcement at all. There were three main reasons for this.

Firstly, a majority reported not having direct dealings with the US federal government, and whatever they may have been doing was therefore irrelevant to their activities. This was true of all the non-Western member of delegations I spoke to (from Africa, the Middle East, and the Pacific region), as well as the interviewees from the indigenous, gender, and business constituencies. Two pointed out that “climate change [was] real”, regardless of what the US President may think, and they had simply continued with their climate action efforts as usual.

Secondly, a few US nationals reflected that more than the announcement of change in international policy, it was the change in national climate-related policies that concerned them. One policy analyst explained that their organisation had foreseen something like this happening “since the election” and had already started engaging with subnational actors long before the announcement.
Thirdly, some interviewees challenged the narrative of the US stepping back from a leadership position altogether. Instead, they put forward a longer-term view of how the US had behaved at COPs prior to the Paris Agreement (see Figure 4.3). One academic researcher who has attended every COP since 2003 explained that the current position was not “all that much
different from the position the US has usually been in since 2000”, noting their failure to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. The leadership position the country had assumed during the crafting of the Paris Agreement was therefore an exception, rather than the rule. One policy lead from an international environmental organisation shared this view, saying that the US “were always unhelpful from [their] perspective”. The interviewee from the Gender constituency had the harshest words on this, arguing that “the US delegation over the years has consistently been at COP to distract, to dilute, to digress”.

In summary, Trump’s announcement was narrated as a dramatic political move that captured the media’s attention, but the short-term consequences were in fact limited on the ground. This may have been due, in part, to the uncertainty surrounding its actual consequences. As I’ve noted above, countries could not formally leave the Agreement before it came into force in 2020, by which time another presidential election would have taken place with the possibility that a new administration would overturn Trump’s decision. Moreover, as the interviewee from the US delegation pointed out, President Trump had left open the possibility of “re-engaging” under other terms, though at the time of COP23 it was unclear what those terms could be.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at three separate, but related sets of narratives produced by actors of international climate policy. I confirmed the observation of existing literature on climate change perception that the very concept of climate change holds different meanings for different people, influencing the terms under which they engage in the negotiation space. Here climate change was perceived as intellectual challenge, as a moral failure, and as a threat, as well as a political tool. There was also a clear divide between developed and developing countries in terms of relating climate change to concrete events. While interviewees from developing countries easily connected climate change to changes in the natural world they had personally experienced, for most developed countries interviewees it was a much more abstract concept.

Secondly, I looked at institutional narratives used to explain both how the Paris Agreement worked, and what its purpose was. There was consensus among interviewees that the Agreement was an effort to improve on past failures, notably in having every country submit commitments and involving other actors from the private sector, civil society and local government more (and to an unprecedented degree in a UN setting). This recognition that nation states alone did not have the power to institute the profound societal change required to limit global warming, led to another point of agreement: the idea of international agreements existing to set a general direction and send signals to encourage action. Following from this, many felt that it was not only what was agreed that was important, but also how it was communicated to the outside world.

I therefore also looked at whether the narratives generated by these policy actors aligned with those I had observed in the media, using the same point of focus as Chapter 3: the “Trump announcement”. Here answers were contrasted. On the one hand, the ideas of “renewed determination” were confirmed by some, speaking of a stymied progress and of new characters in local government and civil society “stepping up” to fill the void created by the new administration. For others, who took a longer perspective on the matter, it was rather the Obama years that had been outliers in the history of the United States engaging with the UNFCCC, and this new retreat was seen more as a return to the previous state of affairs. In other words, the events they selected as part of their plot to describe the evolution of the
UNFCCC were spread out on a longer timescale, lessening the importance of each individual event to build a more nuanced picture.

As I pointed out in the start of this chapter, throughout I have looked for narrative elements in discourse that was often more structured like an argument, as tends to be the case when individuals are asked to speak on complex matters related to their profession. Furthermore, while I was open about what the topic of my research was, only one of the questions that I asked was purposefully designed to elicit a story (“Is there a specific event in your life that helped you forge your convictions?”). In the next two chapters, I will turn to look at what happens when the actors of international climate change policy are explicitly prompted to share stories.
COP23, though it physically took place in Bonn, Germany, was held under the Presidency of the Fiji. The Pacific archipelago was the first small nation island to host such an event, and made a point of instilling some of their national customs in the proceedings, in more or less symbolic ways. Symbolically, some of the traditional ceremonial was embedded in the proceedings, such as the performance of a traditional dance for the opening ceremony, as well as the drinking of kava before meetings. There were also musical and other cultural activities organized every evening around the Fijian pavilion, to bring a taste of the rich islander culture to the otherwise wet and dreary German winter.

More concretely, however, they shaped a formal UNFCCC process according to the rules of a traditional form of consultation, turning what the Paris Agreement vaguely called a ‘facilitative dialogue’ into the Talanoa Dialogue. The Talanoa Dialogue was a year-long process that took place in 2018 (see Figure 5.2). It was launched under the Presidency of Fiji of COP23, and conducted in collaboration with the Presidency of Poland of COP24, following the UNFCCC’s cyclical system of governance. It was divided into two phases: a preparatory phase and a political phase. This chapter examines the documents submitted during the former. The preparatory phase also included a round of physical dialogues organised in May 2018 during an intersessional meeting of the UNFCCC in Bonn, Germany, which will be the focus of Chapter 6.

The process asked participants to share positive, solutions-oriented stories with one another, giving it an explicitly narratival purpose setting it apart from other forms of dialogue on the international climate policy scene. Participants were asked to avoid “finger-pointing” to create an “inclusive, participatory dialogue” (UNFCCC, 2018a:1). This meant in practice that the participants were not allowed to single out a single party or organisation in their stories or assign blame. The Dialogue was structured around three questions that participants had to answer in turn: “Where are we?”, “Where do we want to go?”, and “How do we get there?”. These questions reinforced the narrative quality of the Dialogue: the first two questions give
temporality to the texts, while the third gives it causality, two key features of narratives (see Chapter 1).

Based on this, I ask three questions of my own. Firstly, do similar organisations tell similar stories? In other words, does organisational context influence modes of storytelling? Secondly, are certain types of organisations “better” at telling stories, and what does this entail? Thirdly, can the extent to which different organisations are seen to follow the rules of being “inclusive” and avoiding “finger pointing” tell us something about the power dynamics of negotiations?

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first provides background on the Talanoa Dialogue, its structure as well as the practice it is based on. The second details the methodology I applied in analysing the written part of this consultation process, building on lessons learned from Chapter 3 (the analysis of press articles). The third examines each of the questions described above in turn. Finally, I reflect on what insights a narrative methodology such as the NPF provides that a more traditional discourse analysis approach could not. In particular, I focus on the tension between the granularity of narratives and the challenge of aggregating them.

Figure 5.1 - Representatives from Fiji perform a traditional ceremony, known as the Qaloqalovi, to open the meeting (Worth, 2017)
5.1. Background on Talanoa

5.1.1 A year-long consultation

The Dialogue was conducted in two phases over the course of 2018 between COP23 and COP24 (see Figure 5.2). The “preparatory phase” included three distinct, but linked activities: an online platform inviting Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as any other organisation with a relevant stake in climate action, to submit documents answering the three questions: “Where are we?”, “Where do we want to go?”, and “How do we get there?”. The UNFCCC then organised a round of physical dialogue with their regular stakeholders (the country delegates and NGO representatives who engage in climate negotiation) to also answer these questions. Finally, regional Talanoa Dialogue were held throughout the world, either organised by governments or independent organisations, as a bottom-up consultative framework for gathering inputs on how to tackle climate change. The second “political phase” repeated the exercise during COP24, this time with Heads of States and Ministers as participants.

![Figure 5.2 – Timeline of the Talanoa Dialogue Preparatory phase (UNFCCC, 2018a)]

It was the first time such an exercise had been held within the UNFCCC, and it was deeply influenced by what the Fijian Presidency called the “spirit of Talanoa”, a form of positive
storytelling aimed at both knowledge sharing and empathy building (Robinson and Robinson, 2005). Vaioleti (2006:23) explains that the word talanoa in Fijian “literally means to ‘talk about nothing’”. Talanoa is used in the Pacific to “disseminate information by local government departments, NGOs, village representatives, business representatives and local agencies”, as well as a way of “collecting information from village leaders”. The Fijian Presidency repurposed it to invite all those with an interest in participating to report what climate action had been put in place in their communities and to set out what still needed to happen to achieve their goals.

This is why, in parallel to these official sessions, Parties and non-Parties alike were invited to host their own Talanoa Dialogues at the local, regional, and national levels, with the aim of gathering stories that would feed into the information sharing of the formal process. Around a hundred such events took place throughout the world over the course of the year, taking on a variety of forms. The European Union, for example, organised a Talanoa Day consisting of a mix of panels and roundtable discussions (European Commission, 2018). The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI, 2018) organised Dialogues in 40 different countries hosted by municipalities and regions, often taking the form of townhall meetings. One particular event hosted by the Royal Institution in London in cooperation with the Fijian Embassy had the show-like quality typical of TED Talks, in a lecture theatre with each speaker taking the stage in turn to tell their stories with visual aids. It included a poetry reading from actor Ralph Fiennes, and a speech by pop-singer Ellie Goulding sharing her experience of travelling to the Arctic (5x15, 2018), showing that the “spirit of Talanoa” was interpreted in many different ways in local events. The diversity of events that was organised under the umbrella of the Dialogue showed that different organisations and countries were able to appropriate the format according to their needs and existing practices.

5.1.2 A facilitative dialogue to foster ambition

The goal of the Dialogue was knowledge sharing on the progress made by Parties on their climate commitments. It was mandated by the COP decision 1/CP.21, paragraph 20, which decided to “convene a facilitative dialogue among Parties in 2018 to take stock of the collective efforts of Parties in relation to progress towards the long-term goal referred to in Article 4, paragraph 1, of the Agreement and to inform the preparation of nationally
determined contributions pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 8, of the Agreement” (UNFCCC, 2015a:4).

The goal of the dialogue was two-fold: firstly, it paved the way for the “Global Stocktake”. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Paris Agreement was set up in a five-year cycle of commitments: 2015-2020 was designed as a preparatory period for countries to put together their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and set up national plans of implementation, as well as for the “Rulebook” defining how these contributions would be compiled and, crucially, monitored to be agreed upon. The Global Stocktake was to take place in 2020 to assess the progress made on the implementation of NDCs, at which point the Agreement will also officially come into force (Ibid.), though this has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Dialogue acted as a practice round for such a stocktaking exercise.

The second goal was to build momentum for climate action through better cooperation. Effective multilevel governance is key to climate policy as local actions can have global consequences. The NDC system meant that every country had to come up with both a mitigation and adaptation plan aligned with their local levels of development and specific needs, sometimes for the first time. Better knowledge sharing between countries and relevant organisations could make the process more efficient by learning from one another on how to achieve this, rather than having to reinvent the wheel every time.
5.2. Methodology

As in Chapter 3 (Climate Policy and Media Narratives), in this chapter I used the Narrative Policy Framework as a basis to analyse the Talanoa Dialogue submissions (Elizabeth A. Shanahan et al., 2018) but with some adaptations that build on the findings of Chapter 3.

5.2.1 Selecting the sample

I looked at documents submitted by Parties and non-Party stakeholders during the preparatory phase of the Talanoa Dialogue between January and October 2018. During this phase, there were a total of 473 inputs, including 44 from Parties and 429 from non-Party stakeholders (UNFCCC, 2018a).

Non-Party stakeholders are classified by the UNFCCC into the following categories:

- BINGO: Business and Industry Non-Governmental Organisation
- ENGO: Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation
- RINGO: Research Institute Non-Governmental Organisation
- TUNGO: Trade Union Non-Governmental Organisation
- YOUNGO: Youth Non-Governmental Organisation
- LGMA: Local Governments and Municipal Authorities
- Farmers
- Indigenous Non-Governmental Organisation
- Gender and Women’s Rights Non-Governmental Organisation

For this analysis, I looked at all of the Parties submissions plus 50 from non-Parties, randomly selected to make up a proportionally representative sample of 94 submissions.\(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\) I only considered for selection those written in English, which amounted to a little over 300.
5.2.2 Identifying the narratives

I elected to code narratives, rather than documents. I chose to do this because certain documents contained multiple narratives (e.g. an umbrella organisation such as the Global Covenant of Mayors provided stories from several different cities). Equally, because the Talanoa Dialogue submission forum asked three questions (Where are we?, Where do we want to go?, and How do we get there?), some narratives spanned over several documents (especially in the case of Parties).

I have adapted the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF, Elizabeth A. Shanahan et al., 2018) based on reflections from Chapter 3. The three main revisions concern characters, the causal mechanism at play and the “moral” of the story, that is, the policy solution that the narrator is advocating for.

In terms of characters, I changed hero/villain to protagonist/antagonist to account for the ambiguities revealed by my coding of the press articles in Chapter 3. There I have noted that I had sometimes coded Trump as a hero because he was the main focus of the story, i.e. the protagonist, but this did not necessarily imply a moral judgement of his actions within the narrative, i.e. the text would describe what Trump had done, or said, “objectively”. This is a problem because it means it would be incorrect to say that a certain percentage of articles painted Trump as a “hero” since they were not necessarily saying he was doing good things.

I therefore revised how I was coding for characters in this part of the study to the following:

- **Protagonist(s):** the character(s) moving the plot forward;
- **Antagonist(s):** the character(s) hindering the progress of the plot;

With the last two remaining unchanged:

- **Victims:** those suffering from the policy problem;
- **Allies:** those helping the protagonist move the plot forward.

The second revision is on the causal mechanism. The original is as follows:
Having removed the moral judgement aspect of the character coding, it is necessary to locate it elsewhere. This was reinforced by the fact that, in the case of Talanoa Dialogue submissions, the policy problem, i.e. climate change, was often taken as a given, as shall be discussed later.

I therefore changed my definitions of causes to the following:

Here a protagonist moving the plot forward through a “Benevolent” cause can be considered a hero, while a protagonist moving the plot forward using a “Malicious” cause can be considered a villain. However, these two sets of categories also enable one to differentiate, for instance, an antagonist who blocks a malicious cause and is thus morally heroic despite functionally blocking the story action.

Finally, I develop a typology for the different types of solutions suggested by the narratives, drawing on Dryzek’s (1997) typology of environmental policy and my previous work on climate narratives (Bushell et al., 2017):

- Promethean response: a technological fix to the problem.
- Institutional response: a suggested reform made to current decision-makers (e.g. international community or national government).
- Economic: implementation of economic instruments, appeal to financing of projects.
- Democratic response: bottom-up solutions provided by the “people”.

Figure 5.3. Causal mechanism matrix used in the NPF (Elizabeth A. Shanahan et al., 2018; adapted from Stone, 1989)

Figure 5.4. Causal mechanism matrix used in this study
• Radical: a complete overhaul of the climate regime/dominant socio-economic order.

5.2.3 Characterising the narratives

As in chapter 3, once narratives have been identified in the documents, the next step is to qualify them. This takes the form of a more traditional thematic coding. Shanahan et al. (2018) propose to code policy narratives to account for belief systems that underpin them. I narrow this concept down here to account for the specific policy context of this study. They are broken down in two categories.

The first category is “Paris Agreement Themes”; i.e., the issues that have formally been agreed on as being relevant to the discussion at hand. These follow the various articles of the Paris Agreement (PA, UNFCCC, 2015b), as follows:

  o Mitigation (preventing climate change)
  o Adaptation (adapting to the effects of climate change)
  o Forests and natural sinks (absorbing carbon already released into the atmosphere)
  o Finance (financing of mitigation and adaptation projects, including international transfers)
  o Loss and damages (financial retribution for damage caused by climate change)\textsuperscript{16}
  o Capacity building
  o Technology transfer
  o Transparency (on how Parties report their targets and how they meet them)
  o Global stocktake (the PA works in five year cycles, at the end of each cycle Parties are supposed to take stock of progress made)
  o Education

\textsuperscript{16} This is a particularly contentious issue, related to CBDR (see below)
The second category is “UNFCCC principles”, meaning the underlying concepts that frame the work of the institution as a whole:

- Common But Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR) and equity (see Chapter 2)
- Increasing ambition (the end-goal of the Talanoa Dialogue, of getting Parties to commit to more ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution)
- Gender-responsiveness
- Scientific knowledge
- Traditional/indigenous knowledge
- Sustainable development (and the implication that climate action should not come at the cost of poverty alleviation)
- Inclusion of the private sector in climate action
- Inclusion of different governance levels
- Facilitative/non-punitive approach

### 5.2.4 Finger-pointing

A core rule of the Talanoa Dialogue was the idea that it should be solutions oriented, and there should be “no finger-pointing” (UNFCCC, 2018c). If a document directly accuses a person or an organisation to have hindered climate action, I have made a note of it. This was important to note separately as without the “villain” character, there could be antagonists who did not necessarily accuse another Party of wrongdoing, and vice-versa.

### 5.2.5 Other indicators

Other characteristics coded for were the sources of authority (who is quoted in the document?), level of action, and the timescale in which climate change effects are portrayed to occur (have they started already? Are they starting now? Is the focus on future consequences?).
5.3. Analysing the submission narratives

5.3.1 General observations

As mentioned above, I looked at 94 individual submissions for this study. Among them, I found 86 narratives. Thirteen submissions had no narrative at all. For example, Uruguay (2018) reported on a local Talanoa Dialogue held in the country in the form of a few bullet points on what was discussed, with no identifiable characters or plot. Others contained several narratives. Three Parties submitted the answers to different questions in separate documents; these were gathered and coded as a single narrative.

To avoid confusion, for the rest of this study the frequency of occurrence of a particular attribute will be calculated on the basis of narratives rather than submissions.

**NUMBER OF NARRATIVES IN SAMPLE**

![Graph showing narratives by type of organisation](image)

*Figure 5.5. Narratives by type of organisation. “Group” refers to an official grouping of Parties, like the European Union (EU) or the African Group of Negotiators (AGN).*

Before diving into the specifics of answering my research questions, a few general comments are worth noting.

Firstly, in most stories, the plot followed a positive progression (with a Progress, or at least Stymied Progress story structure) with an intentional mechanism (See Figure 5.6). In other
words, they were mostly stories of policy actors proposing solutions that had worked, or had the potential to work if implemented or given more support and recognition. This is consistent with the Dialogue being designed to share solutions and positive stories.

Secondly, while Mitigation was the most prevalent theme, and indeed the official focus of the Dialogue, others also featured frequently, with most narratives covering at least two different themes (see Figure 5.7). The same holds true for the “UNFCCC principles”. This makes for a corpus constituted mostly of stories covering a broad scope of issues, rather than honing in on a particular one, as I will discuss further below.

Figure 5.6. Narratives by story structure and causal mechanism
Thirdly, the types of solutions proposed are fairly evenly spread, with the exception of a single “Radical” solution I will expand on in the next section (see Figure 5.8). Most propose at least two kinds of solutions. The most frequent type of solution cited is “Institutional”, followed by a combination of “Institutional” and “Economic”. 
Finally, when climate change effects were described, they were mostly described in the present tense. This is a clear indication that on the international stage, climate change is now clearly an issue of the present, not some distant hypothetical future.

**WHEN ARE CLIMATE CHANGE EFFECTS OCCURRING?**

I turn now to examining the three questions I posed above.
5.3.2 Do similar organisations tell similar stories?

My first question asks whether similar organisations will tend to tell similar types of stories. This is a way to ask whether the NPF allows us to see how organisational or cultural contexts might affect discourse strategies. The four types of organisations for which it makes sense to make comparisons are Parties and Groups, Environmental NGOs (ENGO), Business and Industry (BINGO), and Research Institutes (RINGO). For the others, the sample sizes were too small for generalisation.

For this, I looked at what trends could be observed once each of the attributes described above were broken down by type of organisation. Some trends can indeed be identified, with varying degrees of homogeneity.

The most homogenous are the submissions from BINGO. They tend to tell stories of how businesses (Protagonists) have already taken, or are willing to take, steps towards mitigation. They call on governments (Allies), to support them either through clearer regulation or funding. For example, the European Business Council for Sustainable Energy and Materials (e5, 2018) tells the story of materials engineers who have invented a carbon neutral building material. They portray the French and German governments as Allies, who can help them bring this new technology to scale. With appropriate government and industry support, this technology will eventually replace steel, concrete and aluminium.

ENGO stories are more diverse. Though most focus on the national level like the majority of submissions do, they are the category that most frequently homes in on the local level. It is worth pointing out that the only submission which offers a “Radical” solution is from an Environmental NGO. ECOLISE is a European network for “community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability” (ECOLISE, 2018:1). They attribute climate change to the current system being fundamentally growth-centred and extractive. In their view, an entire system change is needed to move to a “regenerative communal model”, through bottom-up intersectional approaches developed by various communities. They themselves act as an Ally to these communities, linking them together so that they can learn from each other.

RINGO stories, are, unsurprisingly, the most academic. Some submissions are even journal articles, serving as supporting evidence, but clearly not originally created for the Dialogue.
They tend to focus on only one or two themes related to specific areas of expertise (e.g. European Academies’ Science Advisory Council focusing on extreme weather events in Europe, EASAC, 2018). Where BINGOs saw themselves as Protagonists helped by governments to achieve their potential, RINGOs reverse those roles, seeing themselves as Parties’ Allies who can assist them thanks to their knowledge. Interestingly, looking at the solutions proposed, the research advice tends to be given more on institutional reform than on techno-fix solutions. For example, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (2018) see food waste and the overconsumption of meat as an “untapped source of GHGs”. They offer to governments the advice of sustainable diet experts to integrate diets into the NDCs, eventually leading to a future where healthier people live on a healthier planet.

There is a lot of heterogeneity among Party submissions, so it is difficult to identify one particular trend. As already mentioned above, Parties are broad in the topics that they broach, many addressing multiple ones within the same document. The next section will comment more extensively on this. Interestingly, the theme of adaptation is mentioned by Parties as often as mitigation, where in every other organisational type mitigation dominates. This hints at Parties being more often off-topic, or at least sharing their official message in its entirety rather than tailoring it to the expectations of the Talanoa Dialogue.

One clear alignment that transpires, however, is the case of several Parties using phrases, and in some cases whole paragraphs, that are word for word identical. Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Arab Group, Iran on behalf of Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs), and Palestine all use the phrase “the story of climate change begins with the first industrial revolution,” (Arab Group, 2018:1). The Arab Group and the LMDCs in fact use the exact same wording by adding an initial question “Why are we here?” before “Where are we?”. Half of the answer to “Where are we?” is also the same, with the Arab Group’s account being slightly more condensed (one and a half pages rather than three), leaving more space for description of predicted climate impacts in Arab countries. In those three stories, the Protagonists are developed countries, whose very development was the cause of climate change. Developing countries are presented as Victims of this, as they are both most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and now asked to withhold from pursuing the economic development Western countries have enjoyed. All three use the concept of “trust building” to mean that no further progress can be achieved until developed countries (specifically Western Europe
and America) meet the commitments they have so far failed to meet (Ibid.). This rhetorical alignment reflects the practical strategies of different Parties to pull their resources together and coordinate their messaging while negotiating, as discussed in Chapter 4. It is nonetheless remarkable to see that Saudi Arabia and Iran, who are otherwise opposed in many diplomatic arenas, should display such a degree of coordination when it comes to climate diplomacy.

In summary, though some trends can be identified, there are more similarities across types of organisations than clear distinctions between them.

5.3.3 Are NGOs better at telling stories and letting diverse voices be heard?

The second question is whether NGOs, who are more used to using storytelling to further their agenda would be better at telling stories than teams of negotiators defending particular governmental policies. If proven correct, this would justify the very presence of non-Party stakeholders in the Talanoa Dialogue, not simply because the content of their stories has value, but also because the way in which they convey it can be inspiring and change the nature of the conversation. Additionally, I was interested in finding out whether they were better at letting diverse voices be heard, as is often claimed. This is not necessarily an indicator on the quality of the narratives in general, but as the Talanoa Dialogue submissions were supposed to contain local solutions, it is an indicator of the level of detail in the stories told.

This seems to be true, on several levels. At the most basic level, 81% of submissions from Parties contain any kind of narrative at all, against 91% for non-Parties. WWF International (2018) and Climate Alliance (2018) both offer a collection of multiple stories, while others like Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand (2018) and the Global Coral Reef Alliance (GCRA, 2018) describe two possible scenarios according to whether action is taken or not. GCRA (2018) propose two technical solutions to ensure the survival of corals: a “biorock” that could act as an “electrical life-support system”, as well as “geotherapy” like biochar to restore mangroves. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand (2018) offer two alternative scenarios: a declining one if nothing is done, and a progressing one if action is taken. The submission warns of the potential mass migration and the loss of entire Pacific Islander cultures if sea levels continue to rise and pollution from “extractive industries” continues to spread. But it also paints a hopeful possible future, where extractive activities on the islands are ceased thanks to education and
divestment strategies. Instead, Pacific populations become more resilient, and island life is preserved.

Among those submissions that do contain narratives, which ones are better? In other words, what makes a good story? Narratologists use the term “narrativity” to argue that assessing whether a text is a narrative or not cannot be thought about in a binary way (“yes it’s a narrative” or “no it isn’t”), but rather that texts can exist along a spectrum, being more or less story-like, i.e. possessing more or less narrativity. I build on this to argue that a good story here can be taken as a narrative that possesses high narrativity (Jones and McBeth, 2010; Prince, 2004). This is something that can be assessed qualitatively, by looking beyond whether characters or plot devices are present in the text, to what sort of characters are depicted, what level of detail and richness the plot contains, and so on.

Figure 5.10. A case study in Japan’s submission (Japan, 2018)

As already mentioned in the previous section, many country narratives are very high-level. The plot either describes negative impacts of climate change, or starts straight at the signature of the Paris Agreement. The policies put in place by the given country to meet their Paris Agreement goals are then listed. Finally, a future where the worst effects of climate change have been avoided, without compromising the country’s other priorities (e.g. poverty alleviation, ensuring equity), is envisaged. The Protagonist is the country itself, sometimes aided by other Parties in the form of financial support or technology transfers. These are generic stories of progress (or stymied progress if it is acknowledged that the world is not on track to curb greenhouse gas emissions to levels that would limit global warming to “well
under 2°C”), with no Antagonists. The EU, Malaysia, Canada, Australia, Korea, Columbia and Egypt all fall under this broad structure.

There are some exceptions to this, like Japan’s submission which contains the description of concrete case studies of new technologies developed by the Japanese and deployed in specific places by specific people, like the geothermal power plant in the Toya-ko hot spring resort (Japan, 2018).

Other countries use their submissions to report on regional initiatives. Singapore (2018), for example, reports on a Talanoa Dialogue that took place among ASEAN countries, though it does not go into much detail. Finland use their platform to report on a Dialogue held in the Arctic region. Here indigenous Arctic people are both seen as Victims of climate change, which is already “deeply changing” their environment, as well as Protagonists bringing about change. Their position makes them particularly well placed to be sources of solutions, and it is through the better representation of indigenous people and recognition of traditional knowledge that impactful climate action can be achieved.

In contrast to most of the Party submissions, NGOs tend to tell more focused stories. Climate Alliance (2018) answers the question by showcasing six different local projects, told by their project leaders in the collective “we”. Their name and picture accompany the text. They are all stories of projects at the municipal level, which start with the recognition that cities can be a protagonist of climate action, an initial project implemented, and plans for future projects to scale up action.

The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy report on a local consultation they held, speaking to Texan victims of Hurricane Harvey which hit the region in 2017 and reporting how they related it to climate change. Acknowledging the link, the submission highlights the tension between wanting to act on climate change and the difficulties faced in altering lifestyles. “Most Texans,” the submission explains, “like most people, want the global climate to stay liveable for humanity. Also, they want to maintain the standards of comfort they are used to” (Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy/Texas Impact, 2018:3). The solution advocated here is for faith groups to get their own constituency at the UNFCCC (they currently fall under ENGO), as they are uniquely positioned within local communities and can foster more effective action.
These smaller scale organisations are indeed able to depict more specific characters. The Environmental University Network of Ica describes young Peruvians’ engagement efforts in their community, and how they have collaborated with local authorities and businesses to raise awareness of climate change in a region where the topic is of marginal concern. The Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon (COICA, 2019) represents Indigenous Amazonians, as its name indicates. Public Advocacy Initiatives for Rights & Values in India (PAIRVI, 2018) report on the experience of Indian farmers.

In summary, save for some exceptions like Japan, most Party submissions have lower narrativity than NGO submissions. The latter describe more detailed characters, with names and sometimes pictures. In this case, a narrower focus on the chosen subject matter leads to richer storytelling.
5.3.4 Are anti-climate action actors more likely to break the rules?

I now turn to the final question. This question has to do with unpicking the narrative strategies of different actors, which is ultimately what this thesis seeks to examine.

There is ample scientific evidence to point to the fact that there is still a large “action gap” within the Paris Agreement. Even if all the targets set by each individual country were to be met, it would not amount to enough to keep global warming below 2°C. It was the goal of the Talanoa Dialogue itself to find ways to bridge that gap. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the international climate negotiations process has been a long and arduous one since the UNFCCC was first created in 1990. Prior to the Paris Agreement, several negotiations had failed, most notably those that took place in Copenhagen in 2009. There are many actors for whom ambitious GHG emissions reduction is not in their best interest. It is interesting to wonder what strategies such actors may use to derail the process.

The “no finger pointing” rule can shed light on this: an obvious strategy is to avoid committing to too much oneself by shifting the blame onto other actors.

Who broke this rule, then? I already described three such submissions in section 2.2: Iran on behalf of the LMDCs, Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Arab Group, and Palestine. These all explicitly point to Annex I countries as being both the cause of climate change and having failed to meet their commitments in order to curb it.

But many environmental NGOs are just as guilty of breaking this rule. Some single out particular countries or groups of countries who need to be doing more: the CSO Equity Review point to the US and the European Union (EU, 2018), while the Energy and Resource Institute of India urge the Indian government to step in in the wake of the US’s announced withdrawal (TERI, 2018). Some single out specific industries, for instance, the aviation sector by the Climate Action Network (CAN & ICSA, 2018) and the fossil fuel industry by the Climate Group (2018) and PAIRVI (2018). In the other cases, blame is implied by pointing out particular policies that are counter-productive, such as fossil fuel subsidies (CARE International, 2018) or carbon capture and storage, (ARCS, 2018). Finger-pointing, in summary, happens on both sides of the argument.

Digging deeper into the structure of these non-consensual narratives, two observations can be made. Firstly, when there is no finger-pointing, it is more likely that there is also no
antagonist (see Figure 5.12). This is true of the majority of the cases. But perhaps more significantly, there is not much of a difference in the finger-pointing cases between whether an antagonist is present or not. This justifies disaggregating the characters’ relational role from their moral judgement: almost half the time, the blame is put on the protagonist of the story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Antagonist present</th>
<th>Antagonist not present</th>
<th>Total narratives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finger pointing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not finger pointing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total narratives</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.12. Finger pointing vs antagonists

Secondly, as shown in Figure 5.13, when the causal mechanism is Benevolent, finger-pointing is less likely, though not improbable. The antagonist does not always prevail in preventing a “good” antagonist to achieve their goals. To put it another way, the protagonist achieves their goal in spite of hindrance by an antagonist. In situations where there are unexpected consequences (for Mishap or Serendipitous causal mechanisms), finger-pointing is consistently more likely. In other words, even when blame is put on an identified villain, it is not implied that they have acted maliciously. For instance, in the story described above of the Industrial Revolution being the responsibility of Western countries, climate change is presented as an unexpected consequence of it, rather than something those countries have created on purpose. There is one exception to this: the submission from the Global Coral Reef Alliance (2018). In their submission, the Alliance claims that the extent of man-made global warming has been known by scientists since the 1980s, but that ever since governments have been “funding research to blame anything else and those telling them what they wanted to hear.” The UNFCCC is described as a “fudged compromise”, with targets set too low as even keeping global warming to 2ºC would lead to a complete destruction of coral reefs. However, this clear accusation is the exception, rather than the rule.
Benevolent is still by far the most widely used causal mechanism in these finger-pointing narratives. In most cases, even if the narrative identifies a villain to blame, the focus of the story is still on solutions; if the protagonist follows the suggested path, then the problem will be solved. For example, Caritas Aotearoa accuses those actors who use Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) in their decision-making, without naming them directly: “CBA in the context of climate economics tries to mimic private sector capital investment for public policy decisions by putting an artificial price on human life,” they explain, “...in virtually all other circumstances, it is immoral and illegal to traffic human lives.” (Ibid., 6) These are strong words, calling out Western nations for discounting the lives of islanders in favour of industrial profit. The blame here is implied, and as such the rule of no finger-pointing is not technically broken.

![Causal mechanism, whether finger-pointing is present or not](image)

Implied blame appears time and again in submissions. In particular, the reference to CBDR acts as a proxy for telling developed countries that they need to step up their action on the grounds of their historical emissions. This shortcut for expressing controversial points of view functions in a similar way to those observed by Fløttum and Øyvind (2017) in other UN and IPCC papers. The African Group of Negotiators (AGN, 2018), for example, emphasise the fact that developing countries are most vulnerable to climate impacts, and present developed
countries either as their allies, if they finally deliver on their commitments, or as antagonists if they do not. The Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA, 2018) paints a similar picture. I’ve already discussed above how Arab Countries make CBDR the core of their argument. They also use the concept of “trust building” to reinforce their point: “Taking into account historical responsibility, previously made commitments under the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol, and the different achievement levels of these commitments by developed nations, it is important to constantly build trust” (Arab Group, 2018:5). In other words, according to Arab countries, it is difficult for them to fully participate in discussions about the future knowing they have been let down in the past.

In summary, there isn’t much of a difference across the causal mechanisms as to whether or not the characters described in the story are good or bad. Instead, blame has been coded over the years into the institutional language of the UNFCCC, and more need not be said by its participants who wish to defend their interests.

5.3.5 Stories untold

Finally, it is worth taking a moment to consider what is missing from the corpus. The first most obvious absence is the United States. This gap was filled by the organisation America’s Pledge (2018), created in the wake of the Trump administration announcing its intention to leave the PA. America’s Pledge’s submission makes the case for how subnational and non-governmental entities can step up if national commitment is inadequate, though the submission does not go into the details of exactly what actions this stepping up entails, beyond a statement of intention. Brazil, Russia, and India are the three other large economies absent.

Omissions can also be seen in the texts themselves. Perhaps the most telling example of this is in the submission of Venezuela. It is structured around the concept of Buen Vivir or the ‘good life’, “a more humane and environmentally conscious development, based on respect and solidarity and oriented to equity, and justice, where profit is a means and not an end,”

17 The US did participate in the Talanoa Dialogue physical meeting (see Chapter 6).

18 It is common for the EU to speak for European countries in the UNFCCC and therefore not surprising that many did not submit an individual input.
(Venezuela, 2018:1). This submission talks about an “unfortunate past history”, speaking of the “lost decade” leading up to the Paris Agreement, but expresses confidence that through cooperation and solidarity progress can now be achieved. Four bullet points make up the whole of this submission’s detailing of national level action, including a mention of the ‘Petro’, a cryptocurrency “associated to the development of climate change related projects at Photovoltaic and Desalination plants,” (p.4) which had in fact failed by mid-2018 (Ellsworth, 2018). Crucially, fossil fuels are not mentioned a single time, a glaring omission from a country with the largest proven crude oil reserves in the world (25.5% of the total in 2018, OPEC, 2019). Similarly, the Arab Group (2018) cite occupied territories (meaning Palestine) as being particularly vulnerable, but make no mention of Syria or Yemen, which was suffering bombings from Saudi Arabia at the time of submission. I discussed the narrative transportation method in Chapter 2 (Banerjee and Greene, 2012) and it can help us understand the relevance of these omissions in a narrative context. It posits that one element that makes a story convincing is its ability to carry the audience along one particular path. In doing so, it shades other elements that could suggest alternative paths.
5.4. Reflection on methodology

I now turn to a brief discussion of the affordances of my chosen methodology. What has it brought to light? Have the changes made to the original NPF been beneficial? What are the limitations?

Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 1, the NPF is designed to systematically analyse policy narratives, allowing for aggregation and comparison. Aggregation here was particularly useful, allowing me not only to characterise recurring patterns, but also to spot outliers – stories that deviated from the norm in some way, such as the Global Coral Reef Alliance, the only one to assign intentional blame of climate change to particular characters. The results of the comparison, especially between types of organisations, were more limited, as I found it was difficult to discern commonalities within these categories that were not also shared with the corpus as a whole. On the one hand, this can be interpreted as the limits of my sample size. This is a limit common to many projects that adopt a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, where the time required to conduct a close reading of texts and coding for a plurality of variables necessarily limit the amount of data analysed. A compromise must always be found between the extensive coverage of information versus its granularity. With only four of the categories containing more than ten submissions, and many containing only one or two, it was difficult to make generalisations.

Another way to interpret this finding, however, is to understand how the constraints of the Talanoa Dialogue rules contributed to producing similar stories. As already discussed, the focus on solutions meant that the stories chosen were most likely to be those of progress, with a “benevolent” causal mechanism where the policy solution led to its intended, positive outcome. This also led many to not waste time describing the policy problem that is climate change, under the assumption that the facts of it had already been established previously in the process, and were known by all. It doesn’t mean that contentious meaning is lost though, as discussed in the previous section. Rather, it is implied and encoded in idiosyncratic concepts that have fashioned the international climate change discourse.

Secondly, the move from the hero/villain dichotomy to protagonist/antagonist has enabled me to distinguish the factual, functional role of each character from their normative roles, using the causal mechanism to assess value judgement instead. This move is useful, but does
not enable a complete disconnection from normative assumptions. There are still cases where I had to rely on my own value judgement to identify whether the causal mechanism was “benevolent” (for example if it helped moving the policy forward) or “malicious”, infusing my own subjectivity in the analysis.

Conclusion

As in Chapter 3, the “quali-quantitative” nature of the NPF has successfully enabled me to tease out overarching patterns in this collection of climate solution narratives, as well as noteworthy outliers. I noted that there was more homogeneity across organisation types than within them. While this result can partly be attributed to the sample design, it also highlights how strongly the rules of the Talanoa Dialogue influenced the resulting stories produced: these were mostly positive stories, acknowledging that appropriate climate action had so far failed to materialise, and presenting solutions to palliate this. Parties were most often the Protagonists of their own stories, either with respect to their national action, or as part of the collective action at the international level. Non-Parties were either Protagonists, calling on Parties to help them achieve their potential, or Allies of Parties, offering their help to further the process along.

There was some evidence to suggest that NGOs were better at story-telling than their governmental counterparts, thanks in some cases to the smaller scale of issues they addressed, but also due to an organisational culture where their very purpose is to represent the interest of a particular group, rather than a population as a whole. As such, their participation into the Dialogue added value not only in terms of the factual content they presented, but also for the way in which they communicated it.

Finally, I was able to refine my understanding of how blame was used by actors. Explicit finger-pointing, or in narrative terms, the use of a Villain, happened on both “sides” of the debate: both those advocating for more ambitious action, and those willing to delay it. But beyond that, it was interesting to see how the principles enshrined in the Convention itself have encoded relationships between actors; one needs only mention the term CBDR or “Annex I Parties”, those of greater responsibility, to invoke past failures and lay the blame for the worsening of climate change.
In the next Chapter, I will turn to the Talanoa Dialogue proper, looking at the roundtable that took place in May 2018 on the side-lines of a UNFCCC meeting, as well as at regional Dialogues. I will examine the stories told orally, as well as how participants perceived the process.
Chapter 6 — Talanoa Dialogue in action

Most of the examples we have studied so far have all been from written storytelling. Even the speeches with which I opened my analysis in Chapter 3 are written pieces of discourse that are read out loud. However, as I noted in Chapter 1, narratives can also be shared in oral form, and indeed entire cultures rely on such a practice. “Talanoa”, the act of “talking about nothing”, is one such practice. While the submission platform put in place in the preparatory phase of the Talanoa Dialogue allowed for broad accessibility, receiving documents from organisations large and small who could not all have afforded to meet in person, the Fijian Presidency ensured that physical dialogues also took place as part of the preparatory phase (see Figure 5.2).

This was organised in May 2018 during an intersessional meeting of the UNFCCC in Bonn, Germany. Negotiators from each member Party, as well as a number of selected non-Party stakeholders were invited to participate in a day-long dialogue session. A total of 305 participants (207 Party and 98 non-Party) gathered in seven parallel sessions. These were held on a Sunday after a long week of negotiation, and the high level of attendance showed the importance Parties gave to the Dialogue.

![Figure 6.1](image)

The “spirit of Talanoa” guiding this consultation was emphasised by the set-up of the sessions themselves. In regular UNFCCC meetings, delegates sit at rows of desks bearing the name of their delegations and ordered alphabetically. Here, participants were invited to first drink...
from a bowl of Kava, Fiji’s national drink traditionally consumed during such social gatherings. They then sat around in a circle at random and ceremonial Fijian objects were placed in the centre of the room to clearly mark the day as a departure from the official, Western-influenced format of climate negotiations (see Figure 6.1). The day was divided into three sessions, one for each of the questions: “where are we?”, “where do we want to go?” and “how do we get there?”. Each participant had three minutes to tell a story related to this question.

It is also perhaps worth reiterating here, that although every Party has a seat at the table of negotiations in theory, in practice not every seat weighs the same. A typical US delegation will count around 200 negotiators and policy advisors, while smaller developing countries struggle to send a single person. This is why countries tend to negotiate as blocks, such as the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) or Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs), to pool their resources and work more effectively (Venturini et al., 2014). The informal setting of the Talanoa Dialogue helped to level the playing field, by changing not only the way people could interact, but who had a chance to be heard, and for how long. There was only one participant per Party, and one participant from each non-Party. A moderator introduced each session and asked for participants to speak in turn on a voluntary basis, gently encouraging them to wrap up if they were running over time. All Party delegations had been invited to send one participant and split into the different rooms at random. Non-Parties had been invited to apply to participate, indicating which question they would like to answer. As was explained to me in an interview with a UNFCCC official, the Secretariat selected participants, aiming for an overall balance in type of organisation represented, as well as regions, though they remained evasive on the particular details of the selection process.

With this in mind, this chapter has two overarching questions: what do policymakers make of storytelling in the context of climate negotiations, and to what extent are they affected by it? To understand this, it is first useful to examine how these sessions were actually conducted. The first part of the chapter is therefore dedicated to observing one particular session, assessing the kind of stories being told, and how moving from the written storytelling explored in Chapter 5 to an oral format affected those stories. I then draw on a set of interviews conducted with participants in the months following those sessions to answer three questions: why they chose to take part in the process, how they understood storytelling in
this context, and the extent to which they deemed the exercise successful. Finally, I discuss the formal outcomes of the Dialogue and some of its implications for the negotiation process.

6.1. May sessions and oral storytelling

The UNFCCC held seven Talanoa Dialogue parallel sessions in May 2018, divided into three parts (one per question) with a lunch and coffee break in between. The 305 participants were divided into seven rooms, each comprising about twenty participants (heads of Party delegations remained in the same room throughout the day, while different non-Party participants were invited in for each question). For the purpose of analysis, I have decided to focus on a single session and to follow the participants over the three questions (see Appendix I for a full list of participants in the chosen session). The sessions were filmed and my analysis is therefore based on the resulting video footage that was made available online after the session. At the start of each question, a Fijian moderator would remind participants of the rules (to tell stories, share solutions, and “avoid naming and shaming”). Once each participant had had a chance to speak for three minutes, there was a short time for discussion (where participants could ask each other for clarifications or add points), and the session was then wrapped up by a rapporteur (a delegate from the Fijian delegation), charged with bringing to the Secretariat a summary of what had been said. Throughout, it should be noted that the interventions were very prepared and very read, rather than being truly conversational, and were made with varying degrees of confidence due to language barriers. Where in normal UN sessions participants have a choice of speaking in any of the five UN languages (Arabic, English, French, Mandarin, Russian, or Spanish), the informal setting meant there were no translators present and all participants spoke in English. The different degrees of fluency meant that some participants were better able to take part in the question-and-answer part of the sessions, as well as adapt their speeches to what others had said. People remained seated when they spoke and took turns in a fairly organic manner. The video footage is taken from the centre of the room, somewhere on the ceiling, with limited camera angles, always focused on the speaker, so all interactions could not be captured, but overall the atmosphere seemed less formal than plenary sessions, and it was clear that a number of participants knew each other (referring to each other by name), though not all (most referred to one another by their country, as is the custom).
All citations in the following sections will be taken from the Bua session accessed from the Talanoa Dialogue (UNFCCC, 2018c) unless stated otherwise.

6.1.1 Are they telling stories?

As with the documentary submissions examined in Chapter 5, the extent to which participants took to heart the direction of sharing “stories”, or what they understood by “stories”, varied greatly.

For the most part, participants used the three interventions to relate both how climate change was impacting their country and what they had done as a result. Most acknowledged the Paris Agreement as a milestone, but recognised that not enough was being done to meet its goals. The least story-like interventions (or with lowest narrativity, to echo previous chapters’ terminology) simply listed policies put in place. Mozambique for example explained that they had created a Ministry of Climate Change following the Paris Agreement and had put in place a range of policies (agriculture, water resource, coastal area management plans, a REDD+ strategy, a national as well as 81 local adaptation plans).

Others illustrated their points with more concrete examples. The Democratic Republic of the Congo delegate, for instance, described his country as the “paradise of electricians”, with the hydraulic capacity to “decarbonise the whole of the [African] continent”. Using a highly-charged metaphor given his country’s recent history, he described Africa as being the shape of a gun, and DRC the metaphorical trigger which would allow Africa to “shoot into development”.

A few participants made explicit efforts to provide a narrative. The intervention from New Zealand was noteworthy in this respect. The New Zealand head of delegation started the morning with a Maori greeting,19 “because Maori have a great oral tradition through which they can trace ancestry back thirty generations from the arrival of their first ancestors from Hawaiiki.” In doing so, she evoked a tradition of storytelling specific to her culture, while also showing that she was adopting a non-Western way of knowing. She was also the only

19 A Maori greeting was also used by the participant from Caritas Aotearoa, making it with Fijian one of the only two non-English languages spoken during the session.
participant who explicitly told a story of national failure when answering the first question “Why are we here?” and was the only one to present a negative example within the session. She spoke of the inflation crisis the country experienced in 1984 and how the government response at the time, while successful in avoiding an economic collapse, deeply affected some regions where unemployment more than doubled as a result. “This could be the textbook for how not to do a just transition,” she noted.

Overall, however, developing countries tended to have more structured stories (or at least with a clearer plot), as they had more to report during the first question on the impacts they were already feeling. Both Lesotho and Swaziland participants spoke of the 2015-2016 drought that affected their countries leading to “national emergencies”. The delegate from Trinidad and Tobago spoke of the devastating 2017 hurricane season, from which some communities were yet to recover electricity. In question 2 this participant would then go on to explain what the country had done as a result of these extreme weather events, and in question 3 what they hoped to do in the future, if given the means to do so. This concrete temporal progression of events was easier to fit into a narrative than, perhaps, descriptions of on-going efforts to reduce emissions by developed countries.

6.1.2 From written to oral storytelling

As useful as the written submissions were in understanding different stakeholders’ experiences and providing evidence of climate action, Talanoa is first and foremost a tradition of oral storytelling (Robinson and Robinson, 2005). There are many ways in which the move from written to oral mode affected the process of storytelling.

At the most basic level, there was a shift in the balance of voices represented. Where over 80% of written inputs came from non-Parties (UNFCCC, 2018a, see Chapter 5), here the dynamic was reversed, with between twenty and twenty-five Parties for five non-Parties present in each session. This explains why most of the examples that follow are taken from country participants; their contributions constituted the bulk of the discussion, while non-Parties adopted more of an advisory role, speaking on very specific topics within the question they had been invited to answer. The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), for example, adopted the role of the scientific voice of authority, providing “quantitative values of our Mother Earth in 2017” in answer to the question “Where are we?” (UNFCCC, 2018c). The
choice of this approach did not give much of a scope for a narrative account. By contrast, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) shared the story of individual farmers: Sylvia in Kenya who had set up kitchen farms, and Eva and Torny in Sweden, who used the manure and bedding feed from their dairy farming to heat local buildings via a biogas station (Ibid.).

Where the written stories were authored in the name of an organisation or country, in the meeting sessions they were told by individuals. While the use of the first-person plural was most often used, with participants speaking on behalf of their country or organisation, some also used the first-person singular, sharing their stories as individuals. Both the heads of delegations from the United Kingdom and the Cook Islands made explicit references to their children in their introduction: the UK delegate to justify his personal commitment to the Paris Agreement on behalf of his children, and the Cook Islands delegate in a similar vein, wondering what his granddaughter who currently lives on a small atoll threatened to disappear with sea-level rise, will make of the work done by the UNFCCC, and whether she will understand the attempts made at solving climate change, even if they are not entirely successful.

Contrasting these serious, emotionally-laden comments, the Korean delegate made a reference to his wife, who he had consulted in preparation of the Dialogue. “In Korea nowadays, the woman is more wise than the man” (Ibid.), he joked, relating her advice to not talk so much, but to listen to others. While meant partially in jest, his comment was not innocent; it noted his awareness of the balance of power in the room, as a representative of a developed country, and signalled to developing countries that he was willing not only to defend his country’s line, but also to listen to others about their experiences, and perhaps acknowledge their struggles.

As I mentioned above, the three-question format encouraged participants to make different points, each building on the last. The decision, however, that Parties should attend all three sessions, and non-Parties only one, whilst meaning that more non-Parties were able to participate overall, also meant that it diminished the non-Parties’ opportunities to tell and listen to storied accounts. Storied accounts were achieved with varying levels of success. The New Zealand delegate again took full advantage of this, building a story around the concept of “just transition”. She established the setting by first telling a story of past failure. She then not only presented New Zealand’s goal of being carbon neutral by 2050, but also focused on
the first steps that were already being taken to achieve this in the power sector, both on the supply side (New Zealand will not be issuing any more permits for oil and gas exploration) and the demand side (getting rid of fossil fuel subsidies). Her third intervention focused on what the country intended to do in the future in terms of tackling agricultural emissions, pointing out that they were investing in research now to develop new solutions for decarbonising more difficult sectors in the future.

Others took the opportunity to tell more distinct stories. Switzerland, in particular, offered snapshot-like insights into the country’s climate change activities. In the first intervention, the head of delegation shared an educational tool produced by a Canton to engage their population: the postcard of a cow with zebra stripes saying “I have already adapted”. In the second, he presented an agricultural program funding thirty-nine bottom-up solutions piloted by farmers. The intention of this story was to show that even though farmers “may have the reputation to be quite conservative in their approach”, they could also adopt a “forward-looking pragmatism”. The third described the challenges of gaining political support for climate legislation; a new national energy law had initially been blocked by referendum, but thanks to increased engagement and consultation, a revised version passed in 2018.

In terms of analysing whether the form of the stories differ, it is useful to go back to Ong’s (2013) four main concepts of addition, aggregation, redundancy, and participation in distinguishing orality and literacy. Addition implies that oral discourse contains more additive clauses, where written discourse uses more subordinate clauses (e.g. “X happened and Y happened and Z happened” vs “X happened because Y happened therefore Z happened”). Aggregation points to a more common use of epithets to describe objects and characters in oral discourse, creating larger nominal units (e.g. “the king” in written form may be “the old wise king” in oral form). Redundancy refers to the need to repeatedly refer back to things that have already been stated when speaking orally, as the audience does not have control of the pace at which the story is being told and needs to be reminded more often what has been said before. These three features do not stand out in the Talanoa stories. This is mainly because, as I have pointed out, the texts shared had almost all been written in advance (from what could be observed of participants using notebooks or laptops), and many participants read directly from their notes, rather than address the group from memory. Orality is a cultural practice that requires experience, with oral storytelling a skill that needs to be learned just
like writing. In most modern societies, people spend years of their formal education learning the latter skill, with little practice of the former. It is therefore not surprising that simply asking people to tell their stories out loud would not be enough to fully adopt features of oral storytelling.

The last of Ong’s features – participation – did play a role in the sessions. This came in different forms. Participants highlighted commonalities between their situations. This was most apparent when countries were members of coalitions. Since the EU negotiates as a block, for example, all EU countries present (Bulgaria, Estonia, Malta, and the UK) spoke both of the targets set by the EU and how they individually were working on meeting them. While many noted that all countries were feeling the effects of climate change, Ethiopia, speaking on behalf of Least Developed Countries, emphasised the fact that they were all affected but “in different ways”, advocating for reporting to the Secretariat not only a global picture, but also a granular one that reflected country-specific needs.

Others acknowledged that they had prepared interventions on similar topics. Both Argentina and Switzerland brought up fossil fuel subsidy reform, for example, echoing New Zealand’s points. Some went beyond theseacknowledgements that they had listened to their colleagues by emphasising that they were here to learn from others as much as to share their own experience. I have already mentioned the Korean delegate’s comments in that regard. The British head of delegation also said something along those lines. He noted that he had received a picture from his team “following the day on livestream” to further emphasise the UK’s commitment to the process. There were also calls for further interaction beyond the day’s event, with invitations to join existing initiatives; the UK called for other countries to join their Powering Past Coal Alliance jointly led with Canada, while New Zealand spoke of the Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform coalition which would welcome more members.

Finally, at the end of each session there was a chance to ask follow-up questions. These tended to be mostly directed at non-Party participants. The delegate from the German International Development Organisation (GIZ) had, for example, shared a story of “community-managed carbon sinks” about a community reaping benefits from the sale of non-timber forest products in Punjab. The project was a private-public collaboration and he was then asked to elaborate on how national governments could best approach mobilising private financing for rural projects.
The last point on which written and oral storytelling were markedly different is on the issue of finger pointing. While many countries highlighted the action gap as well as the need for increased financing and capacity building, the issue of historical responsibility was only brought up on the sixth hour of the session, by the Palestinian delegate. “Trust can only be upheld if countries believe that others are doing their fair share,” he explained. This contrasted with Palestine’s written submission, in which historical responsibility was mentioned in the first paragraphs (Palestine, 2018). By bringing up the point of trust as a concluding argument, rather than an opening one, the Palestinian head of delegation signalled that, while he was willing to participate in the Dialogue and follow the rules, further progress would be difficult to make unless developed countries turned their engagements into action.

It should be noted that it became apparent in my interviews that not all rooms saw the same level of interaction and rule-following. In particular, in the room where both the United States and Saudi Arabia were gathered, people reported a much more stilted and tense atmosphere.

In summary, carefully prepared interventions by Parties and non-Parties alike closely resembled in content the written submissions analysed in the previous chapter; a few outstanding examples of clear and engaging narratives punctuated a series of more classic, statement-like interventions. The move from written to oral however allowed for more individuality and interaction, though again with varying levels of success. Due to the low quality of the video, body language could not be analysed with precision, even though it always adds to a face-to-face exchange. The addition of inflection and tone of voice allowed for additional meanings to be imparted, whether it was jokes to be shared among participants, or palpable tension. The lack of oral features in the stories shared does, however, suggest that the one-off event may not have been enough to change significantly the form of how people shared information, and the Talanoa experiment would likely gain value in becoming a regular event, giving participants a chance to hone their storytelling skills over time for more meaningful exchange.
6.2. Perception of participants

To go beyond observations and understand better how participants perceived the process, I conducted fourteen interviews: five with Party delegates present at the May sessions, seven with non-Party delegates, one with a Party delegate who had prepared his head of delegation’s intervention, and two with members of the UNFCCC Secretariat to understand how they had shaped the process. Some had attended the session I analysed in the previous section, others had not, as I wanted to capture how the experience might have differed from one room to another. Those interviews were conducted either over the phone or in person in the few weeks preceding or following COP24 in December 2018.

While I aimed to interview as diverse a group as possible, reaching out to around one hundred participants, only a limited number of participants agreed to speak, and most under the condition of anonymity. For this reason, no individual person or organisation will be named in the following discussion. Among Party delegates, four were from the European Union, and the other two from the Arab Group. Among non-Party delegates, two were from BINGO, one from RINGO, one from LGMA, one from ENGO and one from a UN body. All the non-Party delegates except the delegate from ENGO were European, with the ENGO participant coming from South East Asia (see Appendix II for a full list).

The interviews were conducted following three lines of enquiry: the reasons for taking part in such a consultation process, how participants understood narratives in this context, and the perceived level of success of the exercise.

6.2.1 Choosing to participate

I was first interested to hear why participants had elected to attend. As already mentioned, the Dialogue was mandated by the Paris Agreement, and it was therefore mandatory for Parties to take part (in so far as anything is mandatory in non-binding agreements). Some nonetheless added that they did not attend just because they had to, but because they were genuinely interested in the “novel” format Fiji had proposed, and that there was a need to “understand each other not as negotiators, but as human beings”. Non-Party participants, however, had to apply to the UNFCCC. Those who did, did so because they felt they had a relevant story to share. Interviewees from the business sector spoke of bringing “solutions”
and a “can-do spirit”, while others were taking up the opportunity to represent groups or voices that may otherwise not be heard.

I then turned to the value that they saw, if any, in holding such a dialogue. All interviewees reported that they saw great value in it (not a surprising result given that they must have seen at least some value in it to agree to further discuss it with me). They gave several arguments for why it was important. Some were repetitions from what was said on the day: that given the known action gap, they were committed to raising ambition, or that while negotiations were always about looking ahead, it was good to also acknowledge the work already being done. Others provided some more context to the Dialogue, describing it as a “blueprint” for what the Global Stocktake would look like. With the final “Rulebook” for implementing the Paris Agreement to be agreed upon at COP24, they felt that the Dialogue was a chance to share their understanding of what progress was in their context, and how to report it. This was particularly true of Non-Parties who had been advocating for their constituency on the side of negotiations, but were eager to support any effort at formally integrating themselves within the negotiation process itself.

A few interviewees also reported having been attracted to the Talanoa method. One pointed out that it was inspired by how Pacific negotiators tended to communicate at the UNFCCC and they welcomed the move to imbue the process with their culture. The interviewee from another UN body attended specifically because he had been working on a similar storytelling methodology in collaboration with indigenous African communities and was keen to share his experience formalizing this form of consultation.

6.2.2 Understanding storytelling

Central to the Talanoa method, of course, was the concept of storytelling. In the dialogue sessions, as in the documentary submissions, participants were invited multiple times to “share stories”, but not much guidance was provided from the Fijian organisers on what sharing a story actually entailed. Indeed the “Guidance for Parties” provided before the session offered a subset of more detailed questions Parties could focus on (e.g. within “Where do we want to go”, one question that could be addressed was “What is the near-term scope for increasing national ambition?”), but no details on the format in which those questions should be answered (UNFCCC, 2018d). Rather, Fijian diplomats tended to demonstrate what they meant by stories by practising storytelling themselves. Each room had one Fijian delegate
as a moderator, and one as a rapporteur, so that they framed each session with their introductions and wrap-up. As one interviewee noted, the diplomat who chaired his session was “typically using a kind of Talanoa approach. He was telling the story of where he came from, and what he was doing and why he was there [...] He was engaging with people at that kind of human level, as opposed to being an ambassador chairing the meeting.” But it is possible that individuals who were not already familiar with the method might not have picked up on this form of leading by example. Therefore, while all interviewees used the term “story” liberally to describe their contribution, it was important to understand what they meant by it, and how they had proceeded in preparing them.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the above, the answers I received diverged widely. On one end of the spectrum, one seasoned diplomat reported that telling a story was not a priority for them. Rather, their goal was to deliver clear messages that would make their way into the final report, and they didn’t see storytelling as being the most efficient way to achieve this. On the other end, some viewed storytelling as their primary mode of operation. Those were representatives of organisations who see themselves as representing the voices of the most vulnerable and under-privileged. As I’ve already touched on in the previous section, the participant from UNESCO had joined the session specifically because they believed sharing their experience of conveying climate science and policy through storytelling would be valuable to negotiators. He described narratives much in the way I have exposed in previous chapters, making explicit reference to characters and plot. The interviewee from a South-Asian humanitarian organisation shared this understanding as well: “my story had three characters,” they explained, “to link the three narratives together. They were real people with whom we work on the ground.” This is consistent with Chapter 5’s finding that ENGOs tend to tell more focused stories.

In between those two extremes, a few participants reported having struggled with striking the right balance between telling an effective story and staying true to their organisation. One interviewee representing an association of municipalities explained that it was deeply engrained in their institutional culture not to draw too much attention to one particular member, but rather highlight commonalities across their membership. While they had worked at “injecting a little bit of [them]selves into their story”, they had struggled not to remain too general in their intervention. Instead, they had made sure that representatives from specific
cities had been invited so that they could tell their individual stories. Similarly, one interviewee from a research institute was promoting their organisation’s work in helping countries develop their climate strategies. They felt it was “up to those countries to tell their stories”, and their own goal was instead to demonstrate their ability to assist countries in doing so.

A few dismissed the question altogether, preferring to repeat the content of their message rather than attempt to answer questions on process. This is not to say these participants did not embrace storytelling: in fact, one particular interviewee who refused to explicitly answer my question on what they understood by the term “stories”, repeated instead what they had shared during the session, which was itself very much a story. They used the metaphor of Mother Earth being “sick” and having been “brought to the doctor” to argue against the no finger-pointing rule. “The first thing the doctor would ask you,” they said, “is why did you come?” Since Mother Earth was sick because of GHG emissions, it was pointless to have a dialogue that excluded a discussion of where these emissions came from.

In reflecting on this, I have to consider my own position and how I may have been perceived by my interviewees. While some clearly expressed interest in my research topic, asking me follow up questions about its wider context, others, including the interviewee in the above example, may have noted my position as a researcher from a well-known British university and perceived that I would be a useful conduit for their message. In their eyes, I may have been not so much someone with whom to discuss their message, but rather a recipient of said message.

There is therefore a case to be made for how participants of the Talanoa Dialogue may have seen storytelling as a strategy. Some sought to demonstrate the value of storytelling as a means of advocating for otherwise-unheard voices, through a curated example. Some demonstrated their strategy by using the same narrative to defend their position both inside and outside the room. And of course, as shown in the first example, others still appeared to think that the storytelling format was largely irrelevant, and they ignored it to focus instead on their strategic aims.
6.2.3 Perceptions of success

The final question that I sought to elucidate was the extent to which participants had deemed the experience successful. This was perhaps the more difficult of the three questions to demarcate, as what counts as success can be interpreted in different ways. Did they play by the rules that were laid out by Fiji? Did they learn something from it, or were inspired by it (in other words, was there any added value for them)? Did the Dialogue have an impact on the process overall? In answering my questions, interviewees added another metric of success to this list by discussing whether their particular strategic goals had been achieved.

Overall, I received a positive response from interviewees. As discussed, this is perhaps not surprising since it is likely that participants who were responsive to my study were also likely to be those most engaged with the Dialogue. The most frequent feedback I received was that participants found it to be a welcome change of pace and format. Some more experienced participants may have already built relationships with their fellow negotiators over the years. COPs are indeed known for having many informal meetings, and “informal informals” where Parties can discuss more freely than in plenary sessions. Others, as I’ve already touched on, did strongly feel that there was a need for them to connect to each other on a more human level. One interviewee pointed out that the Quaker United Nations Office has been organising “retreat”-like sessions for negotiators for several years designed specifically for this purpose (Quaker United Nations Office, 2018), but to have it take place within the walls of the UNFCCC added weight and meaning to the effort.

The primary purpose of the Dialogue being to exchange information, I was interested to see whether participants felt they had learned something new or whether there was any value added to the Dialogue. Opinions varied. The same seasoned diplomat who had not felt telling a story was a priority for them also did not believe they had learned much. This does not mean that they were not engaged: indeed, they had taken extensive notes during the session, which they shared partially with me. Rather, the size of their diplomatic corps and their country’s high level of engagement on climate change meant that they were already well informed on other countries’ activities. They did acknowledge that this may not have been the case for all, and that they were perhaps in this case the exception rather than the rule. Another Party participant confessed that they were very much focused on what was going on at the local level in their country, and didn’t feel like they had much to learn from others, “because every
context is different”. By contrast, several of the non-Parties had very much welcomed the chance to both tell their stories and hear from countries they may not otherwise have come into contact with. Two business participants noted that participating in the session had allowed them to identify commercial opportunities in regions they had not previously considered or been acquainted with. Conversely, participating made the interviewee from the humanitarian sector realise that they still had to “work at making [them]selves more known”. They gathered this based on the number of participants who went up to them during the coffee break and confessed they had no idea that their particular organisation worked on climate change at all.

The second goal was to foster trust-building and empathy among participants. Formally assessing the extent to which the Dialogue may have helped this is challenging. Three different interviewees confirmed that it had been valuable to them to hear that they were all “feeling the effects of climate change in one way or another”, that they “all have the same problems”, that they were “all victims” albeit in different ways. One modulated this by adding that although there was willingness in the room to take action, “no one wants to lose”. But for the most part, it was highly dependent on the interviewee’s expectation of the pre-existing level of empathy in the room. One interviewee, in particular, saw the process as not having been necessarily beneficial for themselves, but for others. Some dismissed the idea that more empathy was needed altogether, noting that the facts that people were sharing were already well known but had failed to lead to sufficient action. They stated:

My personal history means that I am sensitive to the voice of women, of the poor, of the oppressed. So it didn’t change much for me in that regard. I am happy to see that through this process, such voices are more visible. You would need to ask the white men over fifty in the room if it affected them. I can’t reply in their place.

This statement is very rich in assumptions about whose empathy needed to be developed (“white men over fifty”) and towards whom it needed to be directed (women, the poor, the oppressed). It is a perfect example of the weight of power dynamics and cultural politics at play in such a forum. While my sample size is too small to make generalisations about the whole cohort of participants, the “white men over fifty” I did get to interview all expressed empathy towards the narratives of those affected or those struggling to implement action.
I was further interested in the success of the process as storytelling: had they enjoyed the process of telling stories? Did they think it had been well implemented? Had any particular story jumped out at them? In particular, asking this last question a few months after the event itself, I was interested to see whether anything that was raised had made a lasting impact on participants. The narrative transportation theory (Escalas, 2007) argues that narratives are more effective at making lasting impressions on the audience because of their ability to “transport” them through plot and imagery. As explained above, and also noted by one interviewee, most of the interventions were not in fact stories: “you could see that many people were not used to the format,” this interviewee remarked. A few stories did stand out. For example, one story told by Barbados of how a local engineer had developed a solar-powered generator that was then able to install in his community resonated with one interviewee. Another found the Spanish energy company Iberdrola’s “success story” at having transitioned to renewables to be a “breath of fresh air” in this UN-like setting where most of the focus is on challenges and difficulties. Interestingly, two different interviewees had opposite responses to the same story. The Costa Rican delegate had presented the country as a young girl, growing into an adolescent and finally an adult at one with nature. The interviewee from local government found this inspiring, while one head of delegation said it “did not work at all”. In fact, they did not find that the storytelling had worked in their session, remarking that most had not attempted it, and those who did had failed to make it compelling.

It should be noted here that, overall, participants’ perception of whether the exercise had been successful very much depended on which session they had attended. Different rooms had different levels of interactions, as well as different levels of tension. As noted above, two interviewees who had attended the session where both the United States and Saudia Arabia were present reported that the energy in the room was very different from the session I have described above. The story told by the United States was focused around the concept of innovation, especially in the coal sector, and energy security. The speaker repeated the same story in all three sessions. One interviewee noted that it was “the first time that [they] saw materialised the change in narrative linked to the change of administration”, describing it as a “defensive position”. The other also put it very diplomatically: “she was talking about the promotion of coal and nuclear energy, that was a bit surprising.”
There were other, more general limitations raised by interviewees. Though they welcomed the Dialogue’s ability to “inspire”, several pointed out that it was not enough. “Many participants, at least on the outside, were a little sceptical as to the ability of this format to bring about big changes”, one noted. Another pointed out that “real relationship building doesn’t happen in a one off like this.” At the end of the process, then, there was still uncertainty about what would come of it.

6.3. What comes next?

As I described in the introduction, the final step of the Talanoa Dialogue was the “Political Phase”, another round of Dialogue held at COP24 in December 2018, this time with Ministers and high-level decision-makers taking part. The format was much the same, with three notable differences: it was much shorter (two hours long, only focused on the final question “How do we get there?”), the number of participants per room was much lower (only around 12) and the sessions were not webcast, allowing participants to speak more freely. This unfortunately also meant that I was unable to access the sessions, and had to rely instead on reports from a few attendees. The content, I was told, was much the same as during the May session, apart from some more room for improvisation, as some Ministers diverged from the notes that had been prepared for them and preferred to jump on topics raised by others, in an effort, it seems, to foster connections between participants.

Throughout the year, and up until the final days of COP24, the exact fate of the process was unclear. Announcements for who would be attending the final “political” phase were made quite late (with questions therefore around how senior the officials present would be). It was also unclear what the output would be, whether it would be a report, a declaration with some commitments or an extension to turn it into a regular exercise. This reinforced some participants’ scepticism as to the actual impact of the Dialogue. Two formal outputs were produced by the Fijian presidency: a synthesis report (UNFCCC, 2018a) and a Call for Action (UNFCCC, 2018e). The synthesis report was designed to share the “key messages” that had come out of the Dialogue. The IPCC’s Global Warming of 1.5°C report (Masson-Delmotte et al., 2018) was one of the main inputs to the Dialogue, and as such, the synthesis report cites many of its findings to act as scientific grounding. Beyond this it gives quantitative information
on the number of initiatives or policies brought up by participants (e.g. the existence of 15000 climate-related laws). It notes that the process succeeded in “humanizing the realities of the impacts of climate change”, but does not provide any example of a specific story or solution shared, preferring instead to highlight the wide range of actors involved (national, regional, corporate, civil society, indigenous people, faith groups and gender groups), and the wide range of sectors instrumental in achieving a low carbon transition (energy, transport, agriculture, forests etc.). It serves as a perfect example of the fact that narratives do not survive aggregation; the particular is sacrificed over the general, and there is no “one size fits all” story that could have encompassed the multiplicity of realities evoked throughout the process.

The Call to Action, a two-pager read during the closing plenary of COP 24, was, as its name indicates, both more active in tone, as well as more dramatic. “People shared stories of the widespread devastation already inflicted in our communities by climate change [...],” it stated, “Climate action is on the rise, but not at the speed and scale we need.” Directed at the member countries present in the room, this statement used the first person to list all the actions that “we” need to take. It concluded: “we call upon everyone to act with urgency and recognise that we are in a race against time – we must act now to ensure sustainable development and the preservation of life on earth as we know it.”

What about further concrete actions? Throughout the year, the Fijian diplomats spoke of the “spirit of Talanoa”, inviting participants to “bring it with [them]” in every negotiation venue. This served to emphasise that they intended the Dialogue to be a proof-of-concept of sorts for promoting a broader adoption of Pacific practices of knowledge sharing, in the hope that it would help to unstick a conversation that had been going on for over two decades.

Many of the interviewees expressed the hope that this spirit would carry over to the United Nations Secretariat General Climate Summit in September 2019, the next significant event in the climate calendar. This, however, failed to materialise. While an innovative format was introduced during a Youth session, where the Secretary General took part in a panel as a “keynote listener” present to receive messages from youth leaders, though this particular session was cut short for scheduling reasons. The conference otherwise proceeded much like previous ones, with political and civil society leaders taking turns to take the stage and make
declarations, with little space allowed for the level of “humanisation” the Dialogue had hoped to achieve.

As of COP25 in December 2019, the hopes to enshrine a Talanoa-like methodology in assessing the progress made by Parties on their engagements had dwindled, with the Parties agreeing instead to “assess the overall aggregated effect of the steps taken by Parties in order to achieve the long-term global goal in the light of the ultimate objective of the Convention” with no further details on how this assessment would take place.

Conclusion

The Talanoa Dialogue, with its innovative approach of formally introducing storytelling into the international climate negotiation process, in both written and oral forms, and its effort to create meaningful exchanges between different actors who often work alongside each other rather than together, offered a unique opportunity to study narratives in action in a policy context.

The goal the Fijian Presidency set out to achieve, in introducing their own knowledge-sharing practice into a decades-long, Western-dominated process in order to infuse empathy-building in a confrontational arena, was an ambitious one. As I have demonstrated, while most participants, who were new to the practice, failed to share elaborate narratives, those who did stood out. Perhaps more importantly, the setting did create possibilities for interactions between actors who may otherwise not have met and a sense of shared experience among participants.

There is little evidence as to whether storytelling changed the output of the consultation, with both the synthesis report and the call for action adopting the conventional form of UNFCCC declarations, and providing little content that could not be found elsewhere in negotiation proceedings. That is not to say that the initiative failed. Many interviewees reported having seen the process evolve over the year, as more people took part and appropriated it in different ways. The value, then, is perhaps to be found not in the specific outcome of a one-off event, but in the iterative process of encouraging climate change actors to develop shared narratives of the challenges they face and how to overcome them. While it is too soon to say
with certainty whether the “spirit of Talanoa” has lived on, the Dialogue created a precedent for those actors advocating for more ambitious collaboration to keep doing so.

Over the course of the last four chapters, I have drilled down into international climate negotiations and looked at how narratives functioned in increasingly narrower scopes of action. The final chapter will zoom back out, to reflect on what implications this has uncovered, both in terms of narrative theory, and in terms of climate policy.
Chapter 7 — Narrative analysis and practice

In the past four chapters, this thesis has examined the inner workings of the UNFCCC to understand what studying narrative teaches us about the climate negotiation process. This question is two-faceted. Primarily, it is a method question, where I have assessed the usefulness of methods like the NPF to gain insight into policymaking. But it can also be taken as a question for policy practice. In this chapter, I will summarise what I have found in terms of this first, methodological aspect, whilst also addressing the second question by drawing out what can be learned in practical terms to assist policymakers in their work.

Before delving deeper into that second facet, one has to examine more closely what ‘assisting policymakers in their work’ means exactly. In practice, UNFCCC actors have to balance different goals, broadly separated into three categories. At the most basic level, the goal is to reach an agreement; to exit the convention centre with a piece of paper outlining what all countries will commit to doing, followed by more precise provisions regarding how these commitments are to be implemented, monitored, and reviewed. It is the job of UNFCCC facilitators to support the achievement of this overarching goal, by helping to first identify ‘landing zones’ that narrow down the scope of discussion, and work through several iterations of discussions to winnow these landing zones to specific language that Parties can then take back to their respective national governments for signature and ratification. This goal is assumed to be shared by the majority of Parties involved in the negotiation, though some may of course seek to delay, or derail it entirely so that no agreement can be found. That is because the second goal of a given Party is to have their interest represented in the Agreement. This is what takes up the bulk of the negotiation, as different Parties will have different priorities, hard lines and wiggle room. An oil producing country will care more strongly about not having specific sources of emissions named in the Agreement, while a country with large swathes of forests will be more interested in the inclusion of nature based solutions, or forms of compensation for not exploiting the resources these forests contain in the name of conservation.

Finally, as I have discussed in Chapter 4, climate agreements are not covert dealings between powerful men decided on behind closed doors. Neither are they legally binding pieces of
legislation that can enjoy the protection of a judiciary system to ensure their correct implementation and to punish those who may not follow them to the letter. They are very much public affairs, engaged with on a voluntary basis, and enforcement only happens through pressure, either from other Parties or from non-governmental organisations at home. The third underlying goal is therefore to send the right signal to the world outside of the Convention centre, so that the Agreement can lead to the implementation of the kind of actions the actor wants to see on the ground.

It is with these three goals in mind that I turn to the main conclusions of this thesis. They are divided into four sections. In the first, I summarise the stories that have been observed, about climate change, the Paris Agreement, the UNFCCC and policy options. In the second, I examine what these stories have in common in terms of how they function, reflecting on the mechanisms at play that make narratives of these various instances of discourse. In the third, I turn to the strategic part of my research question, to argue that, rather than seeking a single ‘silver bullet’ narrative that will be able to meet all goals, one should approach narrative literacy as a tool to understand the underlying myths and values that a stakeholder evokes. This can help situate one’s own argument within a similar setting. In the final part, I reflect on the limits of storytelling, both as an analytical method, and as a discursive tool used in practice.
7.1. What stories are told?

Before delving into analytical reflections, it is first useful to summarise the kinds of stories that were told in the halls of the UNFCCC, to capture their commonalities as well as their breadth. They can be divided in to the four sections according to their topic: climate change, the Paris Agreement, the UNFCCC, and policy options.

7.1.1 Stories about climate change

A central assumption of this thesis was the fact that “climate change” as a cultural concept has enough plasticity that it has come to mean different things for different people (Hulme, 2009). Chapter 4 confirmed this was the case for UNFCCC actors, for whom climate change evoked in turn an intellectual challenge, a moral calling, a threat or a political tool. These visions were not mutually exclusive, as people often hold several opinions about the same topic, and can navigate from one to the other depending on the situation. For example, while several interviewees from developed countries reported perceiving climate change as an intellectual challenge because of the complex interconnectedness of the natural, social and economic systems one has to contend with to understand how it works, they also recognised that for many, the effects of climate change are a reality that affects their daily lives. In other words, they might not primarily see climate change as a threat to their person or family, but that did not stop them from empathising with those who suffer from the floods, hurricanes, or wildfires that happen because of it.

7.1.2 Stories about the Paris Agreement

Chapter 4 also highlighted how climate agreements themselves had the power to frame which stories were told about climate change. Several observers for example pointed out that the Paris Agreement had led to a paradigm shift, moving from stories of decline that focused on the devastation that global warming and an increasingly unstable climate could cause, to “solutions-oriented”, positive stories of progress that focused on how collaboration between different types of actors (local governments, businesses, NGOs, etc.) could bring about new and exciting opportunities. This observation from internal actors was confirmed by the narratives found in the press sample in Chapter 3. Some reported the US’s intention to step back from the Agreement as a classic game of Realpolitik, covering how other nation states
reacted and which one would take its place as the leader. But many other press articles took this opportunity to cover instead the reaction of different actors, like the Mayor of Pittsburgh (Naticelli, 2017). In other words, the effort on the part of the UNFCCC to formally diversify the type of entities that had a stake in the international climate policy story on the part of the UNFCCC (e.g. through the Marrakesh Partnership) was also reflected in which leading characters the media chose to focus on.

7.1.3 Stories about the UNFCCC

This translation of an internal narrative into an external one reported in the press speaks to the ‘signalling’ role of the UNFCCC. Negotiators see the UNFCCC as a space to find agreement with each other, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to send signals to the outside world and “shape the story” of climate action in their respective countries. This vision, of the international community as a messenger to the wider world was either seen as benevolent (where the ultimate goal is to reduce emissions to the benefit of all), or more ambiguous. Interviewees did not shy away from acknowledging that, as COPs had gained in popularity and media attention, the UNFCCC had also become a theatre to bring up contentious issues in international relations. One interviewee from the Gender constituency reported in Chapter 4 hinted at the issue of reparations, explaining that “colonial powers had to start giving back”. This is a concept that has a formal status in United Nations law since the UN General Assembly Resolution 60/147 passed in 2005 (UNGA, 2006). More broadly, one representative of the Arab Group saw the UNFCCC as yet another avenue through which Western countries sought to exert power and control the activities of other sovereign nations.

As much as the international regime has spawned a multitude of issue-specific organisations, their respective remits do not all fit in perfect, discrete boxes. The Sustainable Development Goals that currently guide United Nations policy are a reflection of that. The seventeen themes each encompass specific objectives that overlap with each other. For example, providing access to sustainable energy for all is the remit of SDG7 “energy”, but reaching this goal also contributes to CO₂ emission reductions goal of SDG13 “climate action”; promoting “good health and well-being” as called for in SDG3 by getting rid of dirty cooking stoves in poor households, increases the “quality education” goal of SDG4 by giving light for children to do their homework after sundown; and so on. In this sense, the UNFCCC is but one of the venues
in which power relations between countries are exerted, and one cannot lose sight of the stakes other than pure emissions reduction that are at play when negotiations take place.

7.1.4 Stories about policy options

Finally, and most importantly, most of the stories discussed in this thesis are policy stories in the Narrative Policy Framework sense: climate change is taken as a problem, and stories are devised to convey what policy actions should be taken to solve this problem. These stories form the bulk of what was explored in Chapter 5. In the Talanoa Dialogue, participants submitted written accounts of what they perceived to be the most pressing issues, and how to address them. As such, these were mostly stories following a positive progression, or “stymied progress”; at the starting point the harming effects of climate change were described, but things would get better if the proposed policy solutions were implemented. These solutions mostly had to do with mitigation; i.e., they were focused on reducing the causes of greenhouse gas emissions in different sectors of the economy. Yet here again, the diversity of themes addressed within a single story was clear; most addressed at least two within the same story, going as high as touching on seven themes, from finance, to forest management, education to capacity building. Faced with this wealth of topics to address, the solutions proposed were of different forms, with an even spread among each type. Some offered technological fixes, for example by presenting new Carbon Capture and Storage technologies that could remove the surplus of CO₂ already released in the atmosphere. Others were economic solutions, like, for example, the Friends of Fossil Fuels Subsidy Reform (FFSR, 2014) advocating for countries to stop making fossil fuels more affordable than other energy sources. Some were institutional solutions, broadly spread into two categories: they either described how a country had equipped themselves with an institutional apparatus to address climate change (e.g. creation of a dedicated Ministry, passing of regulations, etc.), or advocated for the inclusion of under-recognized issues within the UNFCCC process (e.g., giving a bigger seat at the table to indigenous people). The last type of solution, here called “democratic”, stemmed from popular initiatives, rather than top-down government measures. Examples include sustainable farming projects or awareness-raising campaigns led by youth organisations.
Throughout this thesis I have gained valuable insights into what kind of stories are told by the international community to speak about climate change policy. This mapping exercise has enabled me to identify dominant narratives, as well as to pinpoint those which stood out. In some cases, I was even able to trace how a story travelled, like the “Make the Planet Great Again” speech from President Macron being widely reported in the international press (chapter 3), and later echoed in the halls of COP23 (chapter 4). But narrative analysis is not merely about identifying the content of stories – it also allows us to dig deeper into how these stories work.
7.2. How do stories function?

Analysing the different sources I have looked at in this thesis through the prism of narratives has helped bring to light how they were used as pieces of persuasive discourse. Here I want to highlight three distinct ways through which this occurs: ‘selective appropriation’ and ‘causal emplotment’; the identification of actors as characters; and the relationship between the storyteller and their audience.

7.2.1 Selective appropriation

I’ve defined selective appropriation and causal emplotment in Chapter 1, following Somers’ (FFFSR, 2014) and others’ narratological work. ‘Selective appropriation’ refers to the assignment of different weights to events that have happened. For example, one may identify the creation of the UNFCCC in 1992 as the start of the international climate agreement story. Others may see the first COP held in Berlin in 1995, where discussion started on how countries should go about reducing their emissions, as the ‘real’ start. Others yet may prefer to focus on COP 3 held in Kyoto in 1997, since it was then that the first agreement resulting from that discussion, the Kyoto Protocol, was adopted. ‘Causal emplotment’ is the process by which these different events are linked together over a distinct period of time through a relationship of causality. This turns them into episodes within a coherent plot: the UNFCCC was created in 1992, which led to the holding of the first COP in Berlin in 1995, which led to the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. It is the combination of these two processes that turns a piece of discourse into a narrative. One can therefore say that there is ‘emplotment flexibility’ in storytelling, and how one chooses to form one’s plot will inform the version of reality one wants to convey.

We can therefore compare narratives describing the same series of events by identifying which of these events have been selected for emplotment and tracing how causality has been built between these. Firstly, as with the above example, I showed how, by comparing press narratives of Chapter 3 and the negotiators’ narratives of Chapter 4, choosing a different starting point for the story led to very different conclusions about the roles of different characters within it and where the story was ultimately going. If signing the Paris Agreement was the starting point of the story (as it was in Merkel’s and Macron’s speeches), then Trump
announcing that the US would withdraw was seen as the first setback, and was therefore very significant. If, as most negotiators saw it, the starting point was much earlier, when the Kyoto Protocol was first negotiated, then the setback seemed much smaller. After all, the US had never ratified the Kyoto Protocol, and many negotiators described the US as being an obstructive player that had slowed down the process at every step of the way. In their view, American leadership leading to the signing of the Paris Agreement was therefore the exception rather than the rule, with the US falling back into its more usual role.

![Graph](image)

**Figure 7.1: the UNFCCC story from its inception**

Secondly, tracing which events have been selected and how they have been employed to form a coherent narrative allows us, by extension, to see which events were left out. This brings us back to the concept of ‘narrative transportation’ which stands at the heart of the literature on narrative as persuasive discourse (see Green and Brock, 2000 in Chapter 1). I find this in the example of Venezuela’s written submission to the Talanoa Dialogue in Chapter 5. It advocates for a ‘good life’, a “more humane and environmental conscious development, based on respect and solidarity, and oriented to equity and justice, where profit is a means and not an end” (Venezuela, 2018:1). The submission outlines how the country intends to promote this good life through a series of measures, but does not at any point address how their crude oil reserves (around a quarter of the world’s total according to OPEC, 2019) are supposed to fit within this vision. It is also present in the Arab Group’s Talanoa submission. It identifies “occupied territories” (i.e., Palestine) as a particularly vulnerable region, but makes no
mention of Syria or Yemen, two countries suffering bombings from Saudi Arabia at the time of submission. Western countries are not immune to this sort of selection. The EU, for example, is happy to highlight the fact that it has met its target of reducing their emissions by 20% in 2020 from the 1990 baseline, but in doing so fails to reflect that many of those emissions reductions were caused by a shift in production chains. In other words, by counting only the emissions caused by production on EU soil, it ignores all the products consumed by Europeans that used to be made at home and are now imported from China and other developing countries (European Commission, 2018). In other words, as light is shed on certain events over others, the reader is transported, encouraged to follow the path set before them by the narrator. Causality between the events presented reinforces the relationship between them and makes it easier not to see those events left in the dark. Palestine is located in an arid region, making it vulnerable to droughts. It is suffering from unlawful occupation on some of its territories, making it harder for the population to effectively protect themselves from the effects of climate change. The solution proposed is that they should receive special provisions because of this, in the form of financial support and easier access to technology. Crucially, the case is made for Palestine alone as an isolated case, rather than making a general argument for special provisions to be made for all countries under military strain. Telling the story of one region necessarily leaves others in the shadows.

7.2.2 Characters

The next aspect of narrative analysis that sets it apart from other forms discourse analysis is the consideration of actors as characters. This is valuable in two ways: it provides the ability to personify complex entities, and it allows the analyst to disentangle actors’ relational positions from the moral judgement assigned to them.

As I have alluded to in Chapter 2, up until recently, academics and policy advocates alike puzzled over the size of the disconnect between the level of scientific consensus on the existence of climate change and its projected dire consequences on the one hand, and the small place it occupied in public debate on the other.20 Even in countries where the majority

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20 One must always be careful not to overstate the significance of current events, but I have outlined in Chapter 2 how climate change has grown in importance as a public issue since 2018.
of the population accepted the scientific reality of climate change, it consistently failed to rank as a priority concern (Clemence, 2020). In Bushell et al. (2017), my co-authors and I summarised the different reasons commonly given to explain this: climate change seems distant, both in place (affecting far-away places like the Arctic), and in time (with impacts projected to happen in the future, rather than straight away). The mechanisms at play also rely on intangible physical systems (release of invisible GHG into the atmosphere), with causes and consequences very much detached from one another (industrial or agricultural activity on the one hand, extreme weather events and rising temperatures on the other). Narratives allow us to personify the elements that make up these systems, bringing them closer to us. While personification is not exclusive to the narrative form, it is a device that is widely used in traditional stories such as fables and myths, making it easily accessible to the audience. This personification of complex entities is perhaps best exemplified by the story featured in President Trump’s Paris Agreement withdrawal speech presented in Chapter 3 (see Figure 7.2).

![Figure 7.2: Characters in Donald Trump’s Rose Garden Speech](image-url)
American workers are presented as victims of “Washington” and “Foreign Capital”. “Washington” is a shortcut for the previous administration whom he blames for having entered the Agreement in the first place. But it also stands for the wider political establishment and administrative system that is a frequent target of President Trump’s harsh criticism. “Foreign capital” personifies an even less tangible thing: foreign economic interests that would use the Agreement to unfairly compete with American industry, leading to a rise in US unemployment.

Secondly, seeing an actor as a character allows us to untangle the functional role they play towards the development of the plot from the moral role they stand for. The work done in literature studies on the classification of characters is extensive, and I presented in Chapter 1 a few of the most influential systems of classification. The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) follows this line in their Villain/Hero/Victim triangle, which I used in Chapter 3. Considering a policy actor as a character therefore raises questions as to their relational position within the story, their intentions and motivations, as well as how we are to judge them from a moral standpoint.

Through my analysis of the press coverage of the above story, however, I showed that the NPF classification as it stands conflates the relational and moral dimensions of a given character, which can blur one’s results. Thus an actor can be the villain of a given story, in the sense that they hinder the plot moving forward, but the storyteller can still imply that they may not have intended the negative consequences of their actions. For example, an opinion piece in The Washington Post (Millbank, 2017) argues that the decision to leave the Paris Agreement is but one part of Trump’s general diplomatic style, which “break[s] down alliances, undermining intelligence, economic, military and diplomatic cooperation”, and that this will in turn threaten American interests in the long run, whether Trump intends it or not. In this case, the close examination of the US President’s decision-making process (including, for example, speculation over whether a handshake with President Macron may have tipped him over (Foster et al., 2017)) is part of a larger trend of the exceptional scrutiny under which Trump’s Presidency has been placed, focusing not only on his political activity, but also his psychological state (Mitchell et al., 2017; Patterson, 2017). In general, this conflation of a character’s plot function and moral standing can lead to analytical confusion.
I therefore made a further distinction in Chapter 5, choosing to reduce the character coding solely to their function within the plot (changing ‘hero’ to ‘protagonist’ and ‘villain’ to ‘antagonist’), and transferring markings of morality to the causal mechanism category. The original categorisation (Figure 7.3) distinguished between “guided actions” born from the hero’s intentions, and “unguided actions” that occurred independently of whether the hero intended them or not. They were combined with consequences, which in turn were distinguished between whether they were intended or not. For example, President Trump announced the US would leave the Paris Agreement (guided action) and one consequence was that he withdrew financial support to developing countries (intended consequence). Another consequence was that local authorities, businesses and other American organisations came together to form the America’s Pledge movement in defiance of federal policy, something he may not have intended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guided actions</th>
<th>Intentional cause</th>
<th>Inadvertent cause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unguided actions</td>
<td>Mechanical cause</td>
<td>Accidental cause</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7.3. Causal mechanism matrix used in Chapter 3 (Elizabeth A. Shanahan et al., 2018; adapted from Stone, 1989)

To introduce morality at this stage, I shifted the focus from guided/unguided actions to whether the outcome was portrayed as positive or negative by the narrator (see Table 7.2). With this new coding, a protagonist moving the plot forward through a ‘Benevolent’ cause could be labelled a ‘hero’, while if they moved the plot forward through a ‘Malicious’ cause, they would be a ‘villain’ (Table 7.2). Combined thus, character function and causality enable one to differentiate, for instance, an antagonist who blocks a malicious cause and is thus morally heroic despite functionally blocking the story action.

For example, the Parties to the UNFCCC are the protagonists of the Coral Reef Alliance’s story in their Talanoa Dialogue written submission (GCRA, 2018) as it describes how various climate agreements were decided, but because the Parties funded research to “tell them what they wanted to hear”, neither the Kyoto Protocol nor the Paris Agreement ended up ambitious enough in that author’s eyes, due to the malicious actions of negotiators who were aware of what they were doing.
### Table 7.1: Causal Mechanism Matrix Used in Chapter 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal Mechanism</th>
<th>Intended Consequences</th>
<th>Unintended Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Outcome</td>
<td>Benevolent cause</td>
<td>Serendipitous cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Outcome</td>
<td>Malicious cause</td>
<td>Mishap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other policy models such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework are also interested in the relational position of actors, namely how they gather into groups around similar interests and ideas, but give little insight as to the moral judgement ascribed to these actors. Here the treatment of actors as characters enables us to build a richer picture of how the given piece of discourse intends them to be seen by the audience.

#### 7.2.3 Granularity

The Narrative Policy Framework is designed as a positivist method based on a post-structuralist ontology. In other words, it starts from the basis that policy is socially constructed via the use of narratives, but proposes that it can still be analysed using a framework that allows for comparison among different narratives, through the systematic identification of their different components (Elizabeth A. Shanahan et al., 2018). I made the case in Chapter 1 for why I thought this approach was particularly useful in the analysis of narratives in policy-making. I found, on the one hand, purely positivist approaches limited in that they failed to capture the social construction of policy problems and the battles for ideological hegemony. For example, game theory is a popular method for studying climate policy (Wood, 2010) but it models actors as purely rational units maximising their own value, and fails to capture the instances where actors function on different value systems altogether. On the other hand, I was frustrated with the extreme post-structuralist stance that so easily falls into the trap of “hyper-relativity”, where every policy is so inextricably embedded in its specific context that any attempt at comparison or generalisation becomes meaningless.

The NPF appeared to strike a balance between the two. And it was indeed successful in the two studies where I used it (Chapters 3 and 5) at building indicators for comparison.
In Chapter 3, I highlighted how two speeches made on the same day by Chancellor Merkel and President Macron started from the same initial state, followed a similar progression, but arrived at a different conclusion. Both started by commending the Paris Agreement as an achievement of international cooperation and deplored President Trump’s decision to withdraw from it. They then explained that this would not set back collective efforts, arguing instead that this would only renew the determination of other Parties to achieve their goals. President Macron went further, however, identifying that another consequence of Trump’s action would be the withdrawal of support of American climate “scientists and entrepreneurs”. He proposed an alternative ending, inviting them to come to France instead to continue their work.

In Chapter 5, coding for narrative features enabled me to highlight similarities among stories produced by businesses and industry. Most portrayed themselves as the protagonists of a positive story of progress, calling on governments to act as allies, through clear regulation or funding. Focused on mitigation, the type of solutions these stories offer are mostly technological, with the business having developed a new technology that will be brought to scale through appropriate support (e.g. e5, 2018).

But in both instances, I found that aggregation always came at the cost of granularity. A story, to be truly compelling, needs to be specific. We need to understand where characters come from, what drives them, what stands in their way, in order to form an emotional connection with them. This is true both of human characters (e.g., the granddaughter of the representative from Papua New Guinea in Chapter 6 whose island was devastated by a hurricane) and personified entities (e.g. the Amazon forest in its role as the ‘lung’ of the planet, protected by its indigenous allies, COICA, 2019). Beyond following overall archetypal structures, good plots are composed of many events, with apparent dead-ends, unexpected twists, and peaks of tension before they can return to a new stable state. For example, New Zealand’s Talanoa story was detailed enough to draw parallels between the economic crisis the country had faced in the 1970s and the climate crisis they faced today, demonstrating how they had learned from their mistakes and built on previous experience. None of these things can be preserved once each story has been broken down to its component parts and slotted into the appropriate cell of the coding sheet. Thus the questions that could be answered were
ones of frequency (e.g., “what type of solution is most commonly used?”, “which ones stand out?”) but not ones of quality (e.g., “what makes a compelling story?”, “what makes a believable one?”). This was reflected in the Synthesis Report summarising the outcomes of the Talanoa Dialogue produced by the UNFCCC. It took the form of a list, quantifying the different items raised in each submission: “According to input received, 157 Parties have identified economy-wide targets and 140 sector specific ones (primarily on energy and land use), adding up to about 830 targets in total” (UNFCCC, 2018a:3). When some of these targets were described, it was necessarily done in very general terms, with no room for specifics. For instance, some of the challenges and barriers were listed as follows:

- Perceived trade-offs of the changes towards transition to low-emission development with competing national priorities (e.g. poverty alleviation, job security) or competitiveness;
- Policy environments that provide the wrong incentives owing to lack of certainty or long-term stability, and/or misalignments between national and sectoral policies;
- In many cases, insufficient leadership and determination to act at the decision-making level;
- Perceived macroeconomic and political risk that hampers investment and results in higher costs of investing in mitigation and adaptation projects;

(UNFCCC, 2018a:4)

In other words, the report failed to capture any of the narrative elements that were supposed to have distinguished these submissions from other forms of contributions.

All in all, painting a full picture of the collective stories told in a Talanoa Dialogue room or in the halls of a COP is an exercise in pointillism; each dot is rich in itself, but one has to step back to appreciate how they all fit together. Some of their unique vibrancy is necessarily lost in the process.

Yet, as I showed in Chapter 6, in discussions with people who had experienced the Talanoa Dialogue, it became apparent that the “dots”, or collection of individual stories, were not all that had mattered to them about the experience. Many admitted that they had not read any of the individual stories submitted by other Parties. They also said they had not necessarily learned anything new by listening to their colleagues. But they reported a building in empathy; a new appreciation for the facts they may have already known in theory, but that were now
embodied by the people speaking before them. When asked if they had learned anything new by attending a Talanoa session, several interviewees pointed out that a lot of the information shared was things they had heard before, but they were able to absorb them better in that setting, forcing themselves to listen. I showed in Chapter 6 how the stories, once told orally, necessarily became more personal, with the introduction of the first person singular (with the Korean delegate humorously referencing his wife’s advice to “not talk too much and listen”) whilst submissions had been written in the first person plural (e.g. “We are deeply concerned by the findings in the IPCC Special Report on 1.5°C and want to highlight our key points of concern”, (EU, 2018)).

This echoes the participatory nature of oral storytelling culture described by Ong (2013) that I touched on in Chapter 1, where to know is to achieve empathic identification with what is being told. The granularity of each story can then be seen as a device to infuse empathy and build a relationship between the teller and the listener that lasts beyond the individual meeting. In other words, the act of telling itself is just as important, if not more important, as the content of what is told.

Through these three angles of selective appropriation, characterisation and granularity, it becomes clear that narratives add a specific value to the study of climate policy. It also becomes apparent that they can add value to the practice of climate policy-making, as will be seen in the next section.
7.3. How can stories be used?

As I pointed out in the introduction of this chapter, this thesis is guided both by methodological and strategic considerations. I have described at length how narratives have become a tool in the policymaker’s arsenal, used with varying levels of competency. It is therefore relevant to ask how climate policymakers can effectively use stories to achieve their goals.

7.3.1 Narrative as the ‘silver bullet’ of persuasive communication?

An important reason why the term ‘narrative’ has permeated public policy discourse is the belief that it is a powerful device of persuasion. Salmon (2017) traces the introduction of storytelling into political discourse to the rise of ‘spin doctors’ in the 1990s in the USA under the Clinton administration. He describes the growing importance of constant public communication from politicians pushed by the multiplication of communication channels (in the form of cable TV, then the Internet), and rise of 24-hour news media. In response to this growing demand, he argues, increased emphasis was put on coordinated messaging, that could not only explain actions or defend a position, but also capture the attention of the public in an oversaturated media landscape. In this context, narratives were seen as a crucial element to service the increasingly blurred line between politics and entertainment. He points, for example, to television entertainment programmes such as the “Tonight Show” that invites celebrities and politicians alike and asks both to tell personal anecdotes in a standardised 10 minute format.

The Narrative Transportation model (Green and Brock, 2000) offers an explanation for how narratives can change a person’s opinion. It describes how the mind becomes focused on the events occurring in the narrative and how they are able to emotionally identify with the characters depicted. Thus transported to a vivid world, the audience is more likely to believe the information presented within the story. Green and Brock (2000) who apply this model to describe policy narratives (as opposed to purely fictional ones), argue that “transported readers may be less likely to disbelieve or counterargue story claims, and thus their beliefs may be influenced” (p.702). But it is important to remember, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, that there is little evidence that narrative transportation has the ability to change someone’s
mind. Rather, research has shown that people will be more transported by a narrative representing values they already agree with (Kahan, 2008; Lybecker et al., 2013). Yet a lot of the literature following Green and Brock’s original paper has tended to take this theory as fact rather than a speculative explanation. In particular, it has been used to support the idea that it is possible to design a narrative in such a way that it will be particularly persuasive to any audience (e.g. Escalas, 2007; Banerjee and Greene, 2012). This strand of thinking can also be found in international relations and war studies, through the appeal to ‘strategic narratives’, i.e. narratives designed specifically to explain a military strategy either at home or to local populations in the theatre of operation in order to gain their support (Simpson, 2012).

The promise of a strategic narrative to fix climate change is indeed appealing. I have myself previously argued in favour of a “unifying narrative” in Bushell et al. (2017). There, we argued that a unifying narrative in climate change policy, that would galvanise support for ambitious climate action where previous strategies had failed. We emphasised that such a narrative should present positive outcomes to climate action, rather than focus on the negative outcomes of inaction. This emphasis on positive stories can be found in the spirit of Talanoa being presented as a catalyst for stepping away from finger-pointing at causes and focusing instead on sharing solutions. We also argued that previous narratives had “failed” because the setting felt too distant to audiences, and an effective one would allow them to take ownership of the challenge instead. The example we gave is the successful framing of the Space Race as a national effort where every American was presented as being involved in “putting a man on the moon” (p.21). In a top-down vision of strategic communication, once this unifying narrative had been designed, it could be disseminated by different communicators, who would be able to translate it to fit the social norms of their given communities. Simpson (2012) speaks of a hierarchy of narratives, with an overarching narrative under which several smaller, situation-specific stories can fit, again delivered in a top-down manner.

However, since contributing to that paper, through the work on this thesis, I have come to reach a more nuanced position. When trying to apply this approach to the UNFCCC setting, I ran into two challenges. Firstly, as I have argued above, stakeholders are juggling different goals: they need the process to be successful, leaving negotiations with an agreement found on a wide variety of points. They also need the interests of the organisation or state they
negotiate for to be fairly represented in the agreement. And they also need to send the right signal to other stakeholders outside of the negotiations so that whatever has been agreed on can in turn be implemented. For example, agreements about climate finance will influence the kind of projects that businesses or NGOs will develop, as they will need to fit the agreed definition of what counts as a climate project in order to access the promised funding. Given the highly specific focus of narratives as I have described them above, it is difficult to see how a single narrative could serve these different goals.

Secondly, there appears to be a conflict between the idea of a single, coherent narrative and the possibility to have it adapted for local “flavours”, to fit different values. Narratives possess the ability to invoke wider myths and ideologies without having to explicitly refer to them. On the one hand, this allows a well-targeted story to appeal to the audience’s worldview. For example, the Green New Deal policy packages proposed in the EU and the US in 2019 directly cast climate change as a disaster on the scale of the Second World War in the Western imagination and drew a parallel between current policy proposals and the success story of the post-War economic recovery experienced on both sides of the Atlantic as a result of massive public investment (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019).

On the other hand, the implicit manner in which stories resonate with audiences means that they are prone to multiple interpretations. In semiotic terms, they use signs that are polysemic. For example, Marshall (2015) argues that appeals to environmental protection resonate differently with different groups of Americans. To left-wing democrats, this references the close relationship with the land that has run deep within US culture ever since the creation of the first National Park in 1872. To right-wing libertarians, on the other hand, environmental protection is associated with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the set of regulations that organisation is mandated to oversee; in other words, a form of governmental control to which they strongly object on the grounds that regulation impedes civil liberties.

7.3.2 Storifying negotiations?

In the discussions with stakeholders that I report in Chapter 4 and 6, I found an echo of this line of thinking. There is an awareness of the increasing drive for policy actors to “tell stories”
and “influence the narrative” of how UNFCCC proceedings will be reported and how they will resonate in the outside world. Western Party negotiators, in particular, acknowledged the challenge of having to demonstrate that progress was being made. This was intensified by the increasing importance that climate change was having in the public debate at home, coupled with the amount of media attention the Paris Agreement had garnered. “Every COP is expected to be a big COP,” one interviewee summarised. This conflicts with the very nature of negotiations, as negotiators will tend to keep their cards close to their chest as long as possible, using up all the time allotted to them to come to an agreement. Thus phrases like “identifying a landing zone” are used to describe a point which might be agreed on without any Party having to commit to it until the end of the negotiation session. This need to demonstrate that negotiators have fought as long as possible for the interest of their Party, combined with the pressure of ending each COP with some progress to show, reached an extreme at COP25 in Madrid in 2019, which overran by a day and a half (Carbon Brief, 2019).

There is therefore a misalignment between the pace at which such international negotiations can proceed, and the speed expected by the media. Indeed, it is difficult to reconcile the five-year cycle of Paris Agreement goals (with five years between the signing of the Agreement and its coming into force, and another five years before the revision of these goals), with the “12 years left” narrative that emerged from the publication of the IPCC 1.5°C report (see Chapter 1). In addition, the process of negotiation can be quite opaque. This is because of the technical nature of the points being negotiated on; like, for example, defining precisely what counts as “climate finance”, through what channels it can go and towards what kinds of projects. It is also because most of the discussions take place outside of public plenary proceedings, in side meetings and other ad hoc informal gatherings (“huddles”) that are not easily followed by someone who has not attended the COPs for many years. Stakeholders themselves appear to be quite aware of the challenge of telling a cohesive, compelling story out of all this, with one deploring how the discussion of finer implementation details is not “sexy”.

Other negotiators displayed both in their Talanoa participation and in interviews a familiarity with narrative devices in more implicit ways. The Palestinian case is the clearest example of that. In their interview, the Palestinian delegate repeated the content of the story he had
submitted to the Talanoa Dialogue, rather than answer the questions asked. It appeared clear that the messaging had been decided upon, and he was intent on making his point through repetition, at least to an external observer such as myself. Others made use of encoded meanings to set their stories within the broader values of the Convention itself, by referring to CBDR, for example, to cast developed countries as allies who should assist developing countries in their double effort to both protect themselves against the adverse effects of climate change and alleviate poverty.

7.3.3 Towards broader narrative literacy

Given all this, it becomes difficult to see how a single narrative, designed at the top level for all to adapt, could work. Narratives can’t be seen as an exogenous tool that could be used to oil the creaky wheels of a purely rational, story-free process. Rather, we should acknowledge that the halls of the UNFCCC, like all institutions, are already full of stories which evolve organically to suit the need of various interest coalitions.

I therefore believe that what is most useful to policymakers is an awareness of how stories function, as I have described them above, so that they can add narrative to both their analytical and strategic toolkit. Equipped thus, one can quickly identify the main elements of a story being told and adapt one’s own discourse to fit within that story-world. The work of the NGO Climate Outreach follows this approach. They host workshops in different communities to identify the narratives that are told by those within the communities to explain what matters to particular social groups. Climate Outreach then work together with the communities to see how they can integrate climate change into these story-worlds (e.g. in Alberta, Marshall and Bennett, 2018). To revisit the example from earlier, this means that if one is interacting with a libertarian American, one should be aware that invoking environmental conservation to promote renewable energy will directly invoke the context of government control, whereas highlighting instead that producing your own energy means you can live more independently will be more effective.

Several NGO stakeholders made the point in their interviews that adaptive storytelling is an experience they can bring to the table, leading to fruitful collaborations. As one interviewee involved in a disaster relief organisation explained, they have “been telling stories for years,”
to connect individuals on the ground who need assistance with the necessary funds and infrastructure they require, and are therefore in a particularly good position to connect high-level policy content with the on-the-ground lived experience of specific communities.

Finally, I want to reflect on the Talanoa Dialogue exercise in the wider context of the United Nations. Fiji was the first Pacific island nation to host a COP in 2018. The requirement to organise a ‘consultative dialogue’ was already present in the Paris Agreement, but it was up to the Presidency of that year to define exactly how that dialogue would take place. Fiji successfully grabbed this opportunity to introduce a non-Western method of consultation into a heavily Western-dominated institution.

This is part of a larger trend in climate change diplomacy, where smaller developing nations (Pacific islands, in particular) are able to take the lead on certain points, rather than be quashed under the weight of the largest players. AOSIS, headed by the island of Tuvalu championed the introduction of the 1.5°C target in the Paris Agreement when developed nations were of the opinion that the 2°C target was already too ambitious to be approved.

UNFCCC is rather exceptional in that way, and from discussions with the Secretariat it is clear that there is a drive within the institution to keep going in that direction. This drive for inclusivity beyond the formal nation-state apparatus of the United Nations is also found in the presence of indigenous people (IPO), Gender organisations and the multiplication of non-Party observers at the COPs every year. The Talanoa process exemplified that inclusivity. It should be noted, though, that despite the enthusiasm expressed by many at the innovative nature of the Talanoa Dialogue, there was also some confusion throughout the year as to what it would lead to. In the end, the political phase produced a report repeating a collective commitment to further ambition, but did not go any further (UNFCCC, 2018e). At the time of writing, there were no formal plans for the dialogue format to be repeated.

Nevertheless, the novelty of the Talanoa approach had also been reflected in the academic literature on its use in other contexts. So far, the little literature that has been published on Talanoa has been focused on methods of gathering data in Pacific communities. Vaioleti (2006) describes it as both “a method proposed to disseminate information by local government departments, NGOs, village representatives, business representatives and local
agencies”, and a way of “collecting information from village leaders”. Fa’avae, Jones and Manu’atu (2016) reflect on how to reconcile the knowledge gained from Talanoa engagement with Samoan communities within a Western research framework. The UNFCC Dialogue was the other way around: non-Pacific people were asked to share knowledge to fit this traditional format. Vaioleti noted that Talanoa was “natural for most Pacific people”. It would not have been so for most of the people participating in the UNFCC consultation (though of course, whether consciously or not, people will have come carrying with them their own forms of traditional storytelling).

We can therefore see how, while conscious efforts to develop bullet-proof narratives that can trigger mass interest in climate action or overcome ideological divides may not be possible, there is promising evidence that introducing more storytelling within the negotiation process can have some positive effects, not least in terms of acknowledging that non-Western forms of communication also have their place in international settings.
7.4. Limits of narrative analysis

I turn now to a more critical reflection on the work presented above and some of the pitfalls of narrative studies in general. This includes considerations of the size of the data samples, the dangers of relativism as an ontological assumption, and a comment on the timescale of institutional storytelling.

7.4.1 Limited use of narratives in practice

Over the previous four chapters, my analysis has focused heavily on the stories that I found in each chosen area of study. I have also pointed out that in many cases, no stories could be found at all. As precious as the learnings I have extracted from those narratives I reported are, there was overall limited evidence that the majority of people used narratives at all, let alone well. In chapter 4, only five of the fourteen stakeholders told me a story when I asked them about a specific event in their lives that drove them to get involved in climate policy. Many reflected instead on classroom learning, citing high level principles of equity, justice, or economic development. In both this interview round and the one I conducted after the Talanoa Dialogue, there was also a selection bias in the people I interviewed that could not be overcome. COPs are long and intense weeks with schedules that change all the time to fit the many meetings that are organised more or less formally. I approached many individuals, but only got a few replies. It is therefore easy to imagine that those who did not agree to an interview would not have been interested in discussing narratives or the Talanoa Dialogue. It is therefore likely that I have not captured a full picture of those stakeholders who were indifferent to the initiative.

In the analysis of the Talanoa document submissions, I found that 81 out of 94 of those contained at least some narrative form, but as I pointed out, many of those were very high level and mostly bore a narrative structure thanks to following the ‘plot’ set out by the design of the three questions they were asked to answer: ‘where are we’ as the starting point, ‘where do we want to go?’ as the resolution, and ‘how do we get there’ as the series of steps to get from one to the other. This was even more evident in the in-person session reported in Chapter 6. Many did not go further than to acknowledge the negative impacts of climate change on their country as recognised by the Paris Agreement and list the policies their
government had put in place. Few took the opportunity to home in on specific success stories (see Chapter 6, section 1.2).

7.4.2 Setting the bounds of relativity

The second challenge for narrative analysis of the policy process has methodological as well as practical implications. I have traced the introduction of narrative into social science in the literature review of Chapter 1 and showed how it was part of a wider shift in the discipline that broadly falls under the umbrella of ‘post-positivism’. Though there are many variants to this, post-positivist theories share the assumption that reality is socially constructed and all statements of truth cannot therefore be dissociated from their unique social context. Once one has adopted this assumption, the problem becomes one of setting boundaries lest one fall into the trap of hyper-relativism. The extreme view is to say that if all reality is socially constructed, then the search for truth is futile. It is a pernicious view that can be used to divisive ends, to argue that ‘alternative facts’ exist because they are based on fundamental disagreements in worldviews and seeking reconciliation between these cannot be achieved.

I found the Narrative Policy Framework particularly appealing because it helped comparing different narratives. But additionally, it also sought to find a compromise between a post-positivist ontology (reality is socially constructed) and a positivist epistemology (one can devise a systematic method to study this reality), by using the concept of ‘bounded relativity’ (Elizabeth A. Shanahan et al., 2018). This means that the social constructions on which different policy realities are built may vary, but these variations are not infinite. They exist within the boundaries of a limited set of belief systems and ideologies that have some stability over time that can be identified. For this assumption to work in practice, one must therefore pick a categorisation system of ideologies to classify the empirically observed narratives in the given study. For example, Jones and Song (2014) use Cultural Theory (Thompson et al., 1990) to classify story frames about climate change along predefined sets of values.

Here I faced two challenges. The first is to find an appropriate framework for categorising ideologies in a context as culturally diverse as the UNFCCC, where 196 countries are represented. Even in chapter 3, where the comparison concerned publications from four countries of significant cultural proximity (the UK, the US, France, and Germany), it proved
challenging to compare the political leanings of these publications, as the concepts of “left-wing” and “right-wing” look quite different in the United States and Germany. The German right CDU/CSU shares many more policy positions with the American Democrats than with Republicans (Norris, 2020).

The second challenge is that requiring an analysis to fit into a predetermined ideological framework makes it difficult to uncover new ideas that may not fall neatly into one category or the other. It limits the possibilities of tracing how an idea emerges and gets adopted by different cultural groups across cultural divides. In an institutional setting, in particular, it was challenging to entangle whether people really meant the same things by concepts like ‘equity’ or ‘sustainability’ or if they simply used the vocabulary of the institution to match onto their different realities. For example, the Talanoa Dialogue contribution from Samoa that I discussed in Chapter 5 mentioned in the same breath the damages caused by climate change and those caused by industrial development in the archipelago, conflating one with the other. In interviews with stakeholders who described weather changes in their region that had been, according to them, going on for years, (unusual floods, changes in wind patterns etc.) I tried to identify when exactly they had come to make the link between weather change and climate change, with limited success. In one particular interview with a West African stakeholder whose remit was climate finance, he explained that his task was to understand what the new conditions were for access to funds that previously would have been available through international development channels. In other words, the NPF was not able to capture whether people constructed stories to make sense of their reality (e.g., “we are experiencing more floods because of climate change”), or whether they simply matched exogenous concepts onto their experiences in order to convey them to others and ‘speak’ the UN language established by dominant groups.

The a priori assumption of a fixed set of ideologies poses another challenge. It conflicts with the idea that narratives can be used as a tool to bridge the gap across cultures, through the building of empathy that all humans are capable of precisely because they share the ability to relate to one another through the telling of stories.

This circles back to the distinction between ontological narratives – where storytelling is part of an individual’s process to create reality, or at least, to communicate their perception of
reality – and more instrumental, epistemological narratives, where storytelling is used as a tool to fit one’s view within an existing, exogenously created reality. From the observations I have made in this thesis, I find that both forms coexist, and meaning arises somewhere in between the two, as individuals use ontological narratives to make sense of the world for themselves, while at the same time devising epistemological narratives to communicate this vision with others. This is what allows new concepts to emerge and be adopted by a social group, through shared stories. It is to the discussion of this ability to relate to each other through narratives that I now turn to.

7.4.3 Narrative as a relational device

Perhaps the clearest limit of the Talanoa Dialogue ‘experiment’ was that it was limited in time. This was something that many participants noted. One speculated that the Global Stocktake, that was supposed to take place at the end of the first commitment period in 2020 to assess whether countries had met the goals they had committed to, may take a similar form. Others pointed out that the story they told in the room served as an entry point for one-on-one conversations at the coffee break in between sessions. In this way, sharing stories created a sense of personability that facilitated further relationship building. As I have noted, in Fijian, ‘talanoa’ literally means to ‘talk about nothing’ (Vaioleti, 2006). There is a difference between talking about nothing and not talking about anything. Where the second case implies silence, in the first case you are still talking, connecting with one another, but it’s the process of storytelling that is important, rather than the content of the story.

Talanoa is a process designed to build trust and deepen relationships; that is easy to lose sight of when one is deeply engaged in the technicalities of defining accounting methods for various chemicals or designing emission permit markets. And trust-building is a time-consuming process that cannot happen overnight.

This may have been a reason why regional meetings were also set up, so that the Dialogue constituted a series of events that built upon one another over the year. As I have discussed in Chapter 6, these were taken up with more or less enthusiasm, and adopted different

21 It is now delayed as most UNFCCC activity has been halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
formats, from small-scale workshops to large town hall meetings in amphitheatres (e.g. ICLEI, 2018). While I have argued that the diversity of these events was a sign that different organisations and countries had been able to adapt the format to their needs and practices, one can also question whether the “spirit of Talanoa” advocated repeatedly by COP23 President, Prime Minister Bainimarama was not lost somewhat in some cases. The event held at the Royal Institution in London was one such event that felt more like a performance than an exercise in communal storytelling. A Pacific presence was certainly there, with the event opening with a ceremonial kava drinking in which all participants were invited to take part, and Prime Minister Bainimarama himself opened the evening. But as shown in Figure 7.3, the set-up created a clear divide between speakers, at the centre of the room, and an audience, sitting around. Speakers followed each other in series of short presentations. Some invited a limited level of interaction with conventional Q&As, while others were purely one way, such as actor Ralph Fiennes’ poetry reading, or singer Ellie Goulding’s speech on behalf of the WWF. While some speakers made an effort to link their topic to those that had come before, there was no space for dialogue, to “talk about nothing” and create communal knowledge from a shared experience. It was, in a sense, very much an expression of the local culture of the Royal Institution and its two-hundred year history of hosting public lectures.
It should not be surprising that some of the Talanoa spirit was lost in the UNFCC process. To aspire to have so many different communities suddenly adopt the same format of communication was an ambitious goal, an exercise in demonstrating the potential of non-Western practices. As with the introduction of new technologies (Williams, 1985), people need time to familiarise themselves with new forms of communication and to adopt new codes of practice.

I argue that the process is similar for adopting a new form of discourse (or at least, applying a familiar form of discourse to a new environment). Its appropriation by a social group requires practice. And it is through this practice that new shared meaning is formed as dominant
narratives become adopted by the majority and embedded into the fabric of the institution itself. In this way, narratives should be seen as a relational device between the storyteller and the audience, building on shared imaginings to arrive at a truth that is built from communal experience.
Conclusion

In this final chapter, I have summarised how one can look at narrative both as content and practice.

As content, narratives can be enlightening in that they can show features of discourse we might otherwise miss. This is achieved most notably because narrative analysis enables us to highlight which events are emploted and what causal link is built between these events. It is also achieved by seeing actors as characters, both in terms of their functional role within the narrative and the value judgement that is applied to them. Of course, these are not always clear cut. Some characters may be ambiguous, or in more developed narratives, they can change over time. Redemption arcs, for example, where an initially villainous character discovers the error of their ways and works to atone for their wrong doing, are a classic feature of fictional narratives, and can also be found in policy narratives. The New Zealand story told during the Talanoa Dialogue May session was one where the government first made a mistake in the 1970s in their economic policy that led to a rise of unemployment and inequity in the country, but they were able to learn from these mistakes to develop a climate strategy that would be more inclusive and equitable.

The second key learning we can draw from this in terms of content, is that narratives do not survive aggregation. Narrative analysis derives meaning from how its different components work together, and that meaning is lost when components are extracted for comparison. This means that quali-quantitative methods such as the Narrative Policy Framework can be useful to answer questions of frequency, such as “what plot structure is most common?”, but not questions of quality (e.g. “which one is the most compelling story?”). Instead, I find that qualitative questions are highly context dependent, as stories will be more compelling to an audience if it reflects features and values they are familiar with. This was evident in interviews where many participants reported that the stories that had captured them the most were those that agreed with what they already believed.

This means that for policymakers, efforts should be concentrated on increasing narrative literacy in itself, rather than seeking to devise narratives for an ill-defined “audience”. Understanding how narratives function could help policymakers capture the content of the
stories told to them and identify the wider belief systems at play in their given policy environment. It is perhaps useful to picture sharing stories as a discursive game of Battleship, where each player progressively creates a mental map of the other’s values and representation to identify common ground on which to build consensus. Ultimately, it is acknowledging and harnessing the role of narrative as a relational device that is most precious to policymakers. Telling stories and listening to those of others fosters empathy, builds trust and cements relationships for better collaboration.

This is true for the UNFCCC, whose primary goal is to facilitate cooperation among countries. But it also holds for all stakeholders working in the climate space, as I have shown that climate policy is inherently inter-sectoral and multilevel, and action needs to be coordinated if it is to have any effect. All actors therefore need to coordinate to give narrative more of a fully-fledged role as a valuable tool of the policy process, rather than be approached as a quick fix that is the remit of some communication team to convince a reluctant public.
Conclusion

In my introduction, I described this thesis as having a “funnel-like structure”, delving deeper into the world of international climate policy proceedings, the narratives that could be found at each level, and how these narratives functioned. Chapter 7 gathered different insights that were gained along the way. Not all these insights in themselves are entirely new, but put together, they form an original prism through which to consider narratives as a multi-layered relational device that can facilitate or hinder the development of climate policy, depending on how it is used. It is now time to climb back up and consider how to take this prism forward into the wider world.

I will do this here in three steps: first, a reiteration of my original research questions, re-contextualised by the journey they have taken to arrive at the present conclusion. Second, a summary of my main findings and their implications, both for academia and for climate policy. Third, a reflection on the limitations of the work accomplished in the last four years since starting this project, and how these can inform avenues for future research. It seems appropriate to being these conclusions with a story.

1. Research questions: a restatement

My endeavour with this thesis came from the same desire to collect, aggregate, and make a whole of a multitude. I was drawn to the international climate space because it is a unique site in history in its ability to bring together a wondrous diversity of people gathered in one place to discuss a single issue.

Part of narrative work, as Moezzi et al. (2017) explained, is to gather the stories, the slices of culture, that make up a community. The international climate policy space is, as I have shown, a community. Not one bound by geographical frontiers, since climate knows no borders, nor a shared history, since climate affects those with all kinds of histories, but one bound by a threat to the future, which is rapidly becoming a reality of the present. This community (or at least those members who have the material luxury to do so) has now been formally gathering for over two decades at regular intervals to share, negotiate, and pursue common solutions.
Another part of narrative work is to examine how narrative texts function. Joseph Campbell (2008) explored different cultures from around the world, noting similarities in texts from different communities that were told in different languages. In his Monomyth theory, he sought to uncover how myths from all cultures functioned, boiling them down to their essential shared qualities. It is in that spirit that Jones, McBeth and Shanahan (2018) developed the Narrative Policy Framework, to find the shared qualities in diverse policy narratives.

I too examined the function of narrative texts in this thesis, unpicking the elements that make up climate policy narratives, finding them to be both thematic and structural in nature. I found these aspects to be divided rather neatly between the two components of these narratives. Things that made them climate narratives tended to be thematic (they talked about the climate, or used vocabulary and signs tied to wider climate mythologies, in Barthesian terms). By contrast, things that made them policy narratives tended to be structural, in terms of a plot constructed from a perceived problem that could be solved through a policy solution and policy actors cast to play archetypal characters whose moral attributes signalled how their actions should be judged by the audience.

In framing my research problem, I decided that a policy problem such as the one I was tackling was relevant for both academics and policymakers. In the same way as I believe that one can adopt to post-structuralist ontological position while employing structuralist epistemological tools as the Narrative Policy Framework proposes, I also believe that one can conduct rigorous analytical work that can produce both theoretical insights and have practical applications.

In terms of academic reflection, I sought to advance the discussion on what narratives are and how they can be used as a method of policy analysis. For policymakers, I wanted to give them a chance to reflect on their own approaches to climate policymaking, with a view to working more successfully towards their goal. I initially considered this goal to be to advance international negotiations towards achieving more emission reductions to limit the negative effects of climate change, though as my study progressed I expanded this understanding to account for the multiple goals that policymakers may hold, such as to reconcile their current administration’s priorities with the longer term interests of their countries (as, for example, in the case of the United States, whose position on the Paris Agreement changed three times
over the course of my project), or to advance other policy goals via the forum of climate negotiations (as, for example, the case of Palestine in their quest to be recognised as a nation-state by the entire international community).

Behind all these considerations was one underlying motivation: a desire to contribute to filling the gap created by the apparent discrepancy between the breadth of knowledge accumulated to identify, qualify and offer potential mitigation strategies to the negative effects of climate change, and the lack of policy action to put in place such strategies. In other words, the “climate action gap” identified by many academics and practitioners alike, and that we summarised in Bushell et al. (2017). Conceptually, the first task was to challenge the objectivity of the gap and understand its cultural construction. In other words, to understand the dominant narrative that had shaped the conceptualisation of this gap, and the policy regime built to fill it. Practically, the second task was to explore what remained of this gap once this shift of conceptual gear had been operated, if one acknowledged its cultural construction but still understood that the consequences of inaction to be very real, both in physical and social terms, and rife with political conflict.

Thus, this thesis was formulated, the main findings and implications from which I will now summarise, before turning to its limitations and avenues for future research.

2. Main findings and their implications

I will not spend too much time here exploring the paths that led me to my four main findings, as this is essentially the purpose of Chapter 7. But a short reminder is useful to then examine their implications, both theoretical and practical.

The first finding was the development of an understanding of the ecology of narratives that populate the international climate space. To build on the biology metaphor, if one pictures a COP as the pond where animals gather nightly to drink, one can identify several layers of narrative-organisms that serve different purposes and rely on one another to build a stable system. The pond itself is structured by the UNFCCC, with its rules, procedures, and institutional structures binding how the different organisms can interact with one another. These organisms have narratives about their understanding of self (values, perception of
climate change), but they also form groups and organisations that use narratives to cement shared beliefs and preferences, and engage in conflict with other groups for dominance over the COP pond. Finally, at the surface are media narratives, formed with a view of the wider world outside the pond. These may only come at the height of the season when the COP is on to check in on the main bubbles that have surfaced and to broadcast them to others outside the ecosystem.

Figure 1. Simplified ecology of narratives in the international climate negotiation space

The second finding builds on previous academic contributions to the field of narrative policy theory, to highlight two key structural factors that set the narratives described above apart from the other forms of communication that circulate in the international climate space. The first is a refined understanding of *selective appropriation* as a core rhetorical function of policy narrative: through selective appropriation the narrator chooses which parts of reality to focus on, builds a convincing series of causal links between particular events of this reality, and, just as importantly, excludes others. *Granularity*, for its part, is as much a strength as a limitation. Narratives only make sense to the extent that they are highly specific, needing to be understood within a given context, and while they can contain multiple plotlines, these must remain coherent with one another, able to be read within the same overarching story-world.
On the one hand, this means narratives can bring complicated abstract concepts to a human, relatable level. But that also means that narratives do not survive aggregation, and quantitative approaches to comparing a large amount of narratives remain limited in their results.

It should be noted that these two findings are the direct result of the theoretical frame I adopted after careful consideration of the literature on narrative and policymaking. One of the conclusions of the second chapter of this thesis was that the term “narrative” itself holds a range of different meanings. This means that one needs to be precise when demarcating which definition of narrative one will adopt in research, an implication that may seem obvious once stated, but is often neglected.

For my part, I chose to count as narrative those texts that held a certain amount of narrativity, with identifiable features that needed to contain at least a plot with a minimum of three points (start, middle, end), identifiable characters, and a policy solution as the “moral” of the story, whether stated or implied. I could have taken a narrower definition including only narratives of a fictional variety, or containing exclusively human characters, in which case the sample size for each of my individual studies would have been greatly narrowed. Conversely, I could have taken a wider definition of policy narrative as a text seeking to convey a possibly persuasive message. In that case, not only would the sample size have changed, but so would have the methods employed to analyse the texts in the absence of the necessary components needed to follow an NPF-like approach (content or discourse analysis could perhaps have been used instead).

For a policymaker, a word with a nebulous meaning can be very useful if one wants to invite multiple interpretation and make use of linguistic uncertainty to unify (to let people hear what they want to hear, in other words). But a policymaker may also want to be more precise, especially if they are using narrative in an effort to genuinely connect with other climate actors from a different culture. As I have reflected throughout the thesis, I mean culture here in a broad sense. This could mean connecting with someone from a different region (e.g. Europe vs South Pacific) or organisational form (e.g. national government vs grassroots NGO).
This point leads me to the third finding, or rather, intellectual position: to develop an understanding of narrative as a relational device. I derived this from the closer study of Talanoa within its cultural context, as well as how participants reported their experience of storytelling in policymaking; from those for whom it helped make connections with others, as well as those who felt disconnected from the whole exercise. Seeing narrative as a relational device liberates it from the confines of a single text, and inscribes it as an endeavour that builds over time. It derives meaning from the engagement between storytellers and participants, and grows organically as layers of shared understanding settle and solidify. The most significant implication of this finding is the direction it implies for future research, on which I will expand in the next section.

The fourth and final point, which derives from the previous, is an identified need for increased narrative literacy among policymakers. It is narrative literacy – the extent to which they are able to identify narratives and understand how they function, rather than narratives as products, that I believe should be added to their analytical toolkit when engaging in policymaking, in climate change as well as any other context. The implication here is to see narrative literacy as a strand of work to take on, through training, as well as through practical experiences like the Talanoa Dialogue, to allow for each policymaker to place strong and sustainable relationship building with stakeholders at the centre of good policymaking.

3. Limitations and recommendations

Chapter 7 considered the limits of narrative analysis in a policy context. I want to extend this critical exercise here to consider the more general limitations of this thesis as a whole, and offer some consequent recommendations for future research.

The first limit was the sample size of each individual study. As I sought to capture the different levels of the narrative ecology I had proposed to study, the thesis required to study several separate datasets. For three of these I used the Narrative Policy Framework (two in Chapter 3, one in Chapter 5). The NPF is designed to analyse large data sets, but the “quali-quantitative” nature of this method means that it is very labour intensive to do so. I had limited resources (one coder – myself – with help only to test coding sheets thanks to other PhD colleagues). This meant that in each instance, my sample sizes were limited and statistical
conclusions challenging to draw. One simple recommendation from this experience is to recognise that, as much as the quantitative aspect of the NPF has the potential to make interesting descriptive observations (e.g. what percentage of press narratives invoked an "economic" policy solution), one still need to factor in much labour in close reading to make analytical observations (e.g. such as unpicking the difference between how the hero of a story as a character holding positive moral attributes can be different from the protagonist of the story as the character that drives the plot forward).

This is a limitation of the NPF in general in its attempt to reconcile positivist methodology with a post-positivist ontology; striking a balance between aggregating enough observations to make convincing generalisation without sacrificing entirely the granularity that sets narrative apart from other forms of discourse and makes it so rich is challenging.

Turning to the interview part of my research design, I strove for diversity, but did not always achieve it to my satisfaction. Again, this was mainly due to being a single researcher given relatively limited windows of opportunities to conduct on-site research (two weeks at COP23, one week at COP24), on a site where thousands of people were milling around, grappling with their own busy schedules which changed all the time as negotiations progressed. A typical COP attendee will spend most of their time running between venues, one eye on the screens that announce constantly changing times and room numbers for official sessions, and the other eye on their phones as they rearrange in a haste the dozen or so meetings they have scheduled that day. Speaking French in addition to English did open a number of doors, especially among participants from Africa and the Middle East, but I am aware that language barriers did make it difficult to penetrate certain communities. It was particularly challenging, for example, to speak with Chinese representatives (though I did manage an interview with private sector actors). I also regretted not getting a chance to speak with any participant from Latin America, where all my attempts at initiating contact unfortunately failed.

Time proved to be a constraint beyond the whirlwind experience of COPs. I argued in the previous section that approaching narrative as a relational device meant viewing it as process that develops over time. The Talanoa Dialogue was a one-off (albeit year-long) experience, and there is limited evidence that it will carry on. There were no obvious continuation scheduled at COP25 the following year, and COP26, which should have taken place in
December 2020, was delayed by a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic and will now take place in November 2021. If this research were to continue, one obvious direction would be to track whether narratives keep being used within UNFCCC proceedings, either in the form of a revamped Talanoa Dialogue or in other ways, whether pushed by the main organisers or promoted by more marginal groups.

In terms of broader avenues for future research, two main strands stand out. The first is to look at increasing narrative literacy in practice. Does it make a difference in how they communicate with one another whether policymakers are aware of how narratives function? Do repeated narrative exercises of the form of the Talanoa Dialogue lead to a discernible change in how negotiation proceedings get conducted, how agreements are reached?

The other strand is to look at another, though closely connected, site of study. I have argued at length that to obtain meaningful results, the site of study had to be narrowed as much as possible, but other levels are very much worth an in-depth examination: national and regional venues, as well as grassroot civil movements with a focus on climate action like Extinction Rebellion or Friday for Future are rich in study potential.

4. “Et en même temps” — a tale of two theses

As I hope has become clear by now, this thesis is made up of dualities: a profound desire to unite the divided, to bring together unlikely allies, to build a new lens through which a spectrum can shine from an apparently established binary. The work of the last four years has been consistent in this endeavour, and internally coherent. But it has been repeatedly challenging to fit within a single discipline, to know in which department of the university to sit (science communication or climate change research?), to which conferences or journals to submit my research (narrative studies or policy studies?).

The main conclusion I have arrived at is one of relationality – of using narratives to create links across disciplines, across languages, across political ideologies. Perhaps this drive of relationality was always there in my influences, in the relentless recordings of Ruth Rubin to maintain memories from annihilation, in the careful work of Joseph Campbell to compare myths to draw out commonalities from apparently irreconcilable sources. I hope to have built
a convincing case for the power of narratives to do just that; to see narratives not as piles of books gathering dust on bookshelves, but as living and breathing practice of shared human experience.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 — Timeline of significant events in international climate policy

- **1988**: Creation of the IPCC
- **1990**: First Assessment Report (FAR)
- **1992**: Creation of the UNFCCC
- **1995**: Second Assessment Report (SAR)
- **1997**: COP3 - Kyoto Protocol
- **2001**: Third Assessment Report (TAR)
- **2005**: Kyoto Ratification
- **2007**: Fourth Assessment Report (AR4)
- **2009**: COP15 (Copenhagen)
- **2013**: Fifth Assessment Report (AR5)
- **2015**: COP21 - Paris Agreement
- **2018**: Special Report on 1.5°C (SR15)
## Appendix 2 — Media Analysis — Newspaper sampled

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Political leaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>United States</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>New York Times</em></td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Washington Post</em></td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Wall Street Journal</em></td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>USA Today</em></td>
<td>Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Los Angeles Times</em></td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>United Kingdom</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Daily Mail</em></td>
<td>Right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Guardian</em></td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Telegraph</em></td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Daily Mirror</em></td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Scotsman</em></td>
<td>Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Times</em></td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Germany</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Süddeutsche Zeitung</em></td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Tageszeitung</em></td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</em></td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Die Welt</em></td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>France</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Le Figaro</em></td>
<td>Right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Le Monde</em></td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Libération</em></td>
<td>Left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Le Parisien</em></td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 3 — Media Analysis — Coding Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identifying a narrative</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Characters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Villain</td>
<td>Causer of the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hero/ally</td>
<td>Fixer of the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>Those harmed by the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Plot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Y/N and which one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Y/N and which one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>End</td>
<td>Y/N and which one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Causal mechanism (what causes the problem)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intentional</td>
<td>The event is caused on purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inadvertent</td>
<td>The event was caused by someone for a specific purpose, but the result was not intended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>The event could not have been avoided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Solutions (Moral of the story prompting action or resolution)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y/N and which one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifying the narrative</td>
<td>Label</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Type of story</td>
<td>Stymied progress</td>
<td>Prior progress threatened or impeded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Deteriorating positive/desired state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change is only an illusion</td>
<td>Perceived improvement/decline is the opposite of reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td>Bad situation is out of our control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Conspiracy</td>
<td>Fated bad situation is actually controlled by select few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blame the victim</td>
<td>Victims control/perpetuate situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Countries/Regions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Germany, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China</td>
<td>India, European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Themes</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Cities, Energy policy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign policy</td>
<td>States/Federalism, Environmental policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Climate science</td>
<td>MTPGA, Businesses</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Climate skepticism</td>
<td>Trump's personality, Green Climate Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reactions</td>
<td>White House internal affairs, Press coverage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
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## Appendix 4 — Interviewee breakdown — COP23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation Type</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
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<td>Member of delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>North Africa and Middle East</td>
<td>Member of delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>North Africa and Middle East</td>
<td>Member of delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>Member of delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Head of delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Member of delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Member of delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>Member of delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BINGO</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Director of Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGO</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Head of organisation (Advocacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGO</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Head of Climate Negotiations Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGO</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Programme Officer (Climate Litigation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGMA</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGMA</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Program officer (State Department of Environment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RINGO</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Policy analyst (Climate Law)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RINGO</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Policy analyst (Climate Economics)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5 - Interview protocol — COP23

Research questions

The roundtable on climate change narratives organised by the Grantham Institute, which gathered British academics and policy-makers in January 2017 demonstrated the existence of an interest in furthering the understanding the use of narratives in climate change strategy. The annual Conventions of the Parties of the UNFCCC (COPs) are particularly interesting places to observe climate change strategy in action. COP23 will be hosted by the government of Fiji in Bonn, Germany between November 6 and 17 2017.

This project focuses on answering the following questions:

☐ To what extent are narratives used as devices for strategic positioning and consensus building on climate change policy?

☐ How do international climate policy stakeholders respond to dominant narratives on their work?

☐ Is there a difference between the narratives organisations use to explain a specific policy event that disrupt the status quo and the narratives they use to express their personal positions on the matter?

Methodology

A mixed methodology is taken to address these research questions through a combination of one-on-one interviews and ethnographic observation.

I will conduct a series of 10-15 interviews with delegates and representatives of civil society during COP23 in Bonn between November 6 and November 17 2017.
Each interview will last half an hour and be audio recorded after securing consent from the interviewee. I will also offer them anonymity should they prefer it. I will in turn transcribe these interviews and analyse them using narrative analysis.

These interviews will be enriched by a careful observation of plenary sessions of the convention, as well as side events and social interactions taking place throughout the COP to document the different sites of interactions between attendees and the narratives expressed during these interactions.

Interview questions

After a brief introduction of my research project, I will ask questions aimed at eliciting both “institutional” narratives where the interviewee acts as a representative of their organisation, and “personal” narratives where the interviewee speaks from their personal experience of attending climate negotiations.

I will ask the following set of questions:

1. Has President Trump’s announcement that the USA would be leaving the Paris Agreement affected your institution’s position? How are you communicating this position?
2. What has been the biggest challenge facing the COP negotiations so far?
3. What will be the biggest challenge facing the COP going forward?
4. On a personal level, how do you feel about the direction the negotiations are taking?
5. Why did you join your organisation?
6. How long have you held your current position? Have you attended previous COPs in this role?
7. Why do you think international cooperation on climate change is important? Was there a particular event in your life that forged your convictions?

Risks

The risks associated with this study are very low. The interviews will take place in a public place after consent has been secured and anonymity offered. Some interviewees may retract
their comments or opt out of the study altogether, but this is should not affect the viability of the research because of the qualitative nature of the methodology.
## Appendix 6 — Talanoa Dialogue Coding Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identifying a narrative</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(1) Characters</strong></td>
<td>Protagonist</td>
<td>The character(s) moving the plot forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antagonist</td>
<td>The character(s) hindering the progress of the plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>Those harmed by the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(2) Plot</strong></td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Y/N and which one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Y/N and which one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>End</td>
<td>Y/N and which one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(3) Causal mechanism (what causes the problem)</strong></td>
<td>Benevolent</td>
<td>Intended consequences resulting in a positive outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malicious</td>
<td>Intended consequences resulting in a negative outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serendipitous</td>
<td>Unintended consequences resulting in a positive outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mishap</td>
<td>Unintended consequences resulting in a negative outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(4) Solutions (Moral of the story prompting action or resolution)</strong></td>
<td>Promethean (technological)</td>
<td>Institutional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Radical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifying the narrative</td>
<td>Label</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Type of story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stymied progress</td>
<td>Prior progress threatened or impeded</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Deteriorating positive/desired state</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Perceived improvement/decline is the opposite of reality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td>Bad situation is out of our control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conspiracy</td>
<td>Fated bad situation is actually controlled by select few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blame the victim</td>
<td>Victims control/perpetuate situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Level of action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Regional (e.g. EU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Paris Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Mitigation</td>
<td>Adaptation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loss and damages</td>
<td>Finance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technology transfer</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Glocal Stocktake</td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) Guiding Principles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the UNFCCC</td>
<td>Common But Differenciated Responsibility/Equity</td>
<td>Increasing ambition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scientific knowledge</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private sector actors</td>
<td>Sustainable development</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Sources of authority</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)</td>
<td>Academia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Inter-Governmental Organisation (IGO)</td>
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<td>(6) When in climate change happening?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Future effects</td>
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Appendix 7 — May 2018 “Bua” Session Participants

Parties participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Argentina</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Burundi</td>
<td>15. South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cook Islands</td>
<td>16. Swaziland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>17. Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ethiopia – on behalf of LDCs</td>
<td>19. Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Guyana</td>
<td>20. Togo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Lesotho</td>
<td>21. Trinidad and Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Malta</td>
<td>22. United Arab Emirates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Mozambique</td>
<td>23. United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. New Zealand</td>
<td>24. Vietnam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Non-Parties participants

Session 1 — Where are we?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand</td>
<td>ENGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)</td>
<td>ENGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. United Nations (UN)</td>
<td>IGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. United States Council for International Business (USCIB)</td>
<td>BINGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. World Meteorological Organisation (WMO)</td>
<td>IGO</td>
</tr>
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### Session 2 – Where do we want to go?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)</td>
<td>ENGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)</td>
<td>Farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. International Network for Sustainable Energy (INFORSE)</td>
<td>ENGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)</td>
<td>IGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN)</td>
<td>Gender</td>
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</table>

### Session 3 – How do we get there?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. British Telecom (BT)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. CliMates</td>
<td>YOUNGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. MobiliseYourCity Partnership</td>
<td>LGMA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Stockholm International Water Institute</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. World Resources Institute</td>
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## Appendix 8 — Interviewee breakdown — COP24

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Party</td>
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<td>Head of Delegation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Party</td>
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<td>Head of Delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Head of Delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Head of Delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Head of Delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Head of Delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RINGO</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Programme Lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGMA</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Programme Lead</td>
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<tr>
<td>BINGO</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Head of Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BINGO</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Head of Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BINGO</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Head of Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGO</td>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>Programme Lead</td>
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<td>IGO</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Programme Lead</td>
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<td>UNFCCC</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Programme Lead</td>
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<td>UNFCCC</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Programme Lead</td>
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Appendix 9 — Interview protocol — COP24

Background

The Paris Agreement signed in December 2015 introduced two innovations to the international climate regime. It stepped from the top-down approach of the Kyoto Protocol to create a bottom-up mechanism whereby each country party to the agreement provided their own nationally determined contributions to reach the common goal of limiting global warming to 2°C. It also opened the door for non-party actors – subnational governments, NGOs, businesses and civil society to take on a more formal consultative role in the negotiation process.

This was built two years later at COP23, presided by Fiji, the first small island nation ever to lead a COP. The Fijian Presidency further developed this consultation mechanism by launching the Talanoa Dialogue, named after a traditional Pacific method of exchange: “the purpose of Talanoa is to share stories, build empathy and to make wise decisions for the collective good. The process of Talanoa involves the sharing of ideas, skills and experience through storytelling” (UNFCCC, 2018).

This new, narrative-oriented, aspect of the negotiation process is consistent with recent work in policy theory that suggests that the telling of stories may be a more effective way to present complex policy issues than a fact-based, scientific approach that has so far dominated the UNFCCC. In the context of climate change, where science is inextricably entangled with political and economic interests, stories can help their audience take a step back from contentious technical jargon and map out common ground where agreement can eventually be achieved.

A series of these dialogues were held at the UNFCCC in May 2018, where a select number of representatives from countries as well as non-governmental organisations were asked to share stories in turn to reflect on the progress that has been made with regards to the Paris Agreement, and how more ambitious action can take place. They were also asked to focus on their own positive achievements and refrain from “finger pointing” and accusing other parties of taking the right actions.
Research questions

- To what extent are narratives used as devices for strategic positioning and consensus building on climate change policy?
- Do organisations change the information they are sharing when they are explicitly asked to tell a story?
- Is this sharing of stories helpful to the furthering of climate change agreements?

Methodology

I will conduct a series of 10-15 interviews with participants of the UNFCCC Talanoa Dialogue Meeting that took place on May 6 2018, either in person or over the phone. Each interview will last half an hour and be audio recorded after securing consent from the interviewee. I will also offer them anonymity should they prefer it. I will in turn transcribe these interviews and analyse them using narrative analysis. I have already interviewed a number of study participants in November 2017 before the Talanoa Dialogue initiative was launched, and the current study will therefore serve as a follow-up to reflect on how the initiative has developed over the year.

Interview questions

1. What is your position in your organisation and how long have you held it?
2. How long have you been participating in the COP process?
3. Why did you want to participate in the Talanoa Dialogue?
4. The Talanoa Dialogue guidelines explicitly asks participants to share stories, did that influence the way you presented the information you wanted to share?
5. If so, what did you understand by stories in this context?
6. How did you select the information that you wanted to share?
7. What did you learn from listening to others?
8. More specifically, was any of the information that was shared new to you? Were you surprised by any?
9. Did participating in that process change some of your views on the current state of negotiations and how to increase ambition?
10. Did it create new connections or possibilities of partnerships for you?
11. Did you find the process useful? Were there any limitations?
Risks

The risks associated with this study are very low. The interviews will take place after consent has been secured and anonymity offered. Some interviewees may retract their comments or opt out of the study altogether, but this is should not affect the viability of the research because of the qualitative nature of the methodology.