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Climate change activism between weak and strong environmentalism: Advocating social change with moderate argumentation strategies?

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Introduction

There are certain social transformations that are to a large extent socially accepted as desirable, and yet fail to happen, or at best progress very slowly. Today some of these transformations are supported by global governance tools, such as international protocols and treaties, signed in supra-national forums and afterwards transposed to national legislative frameworks (Giddens, 2009; Castro, 2012). Climate change (CC) is a case in point, and perhaps the best current example of a global governance effort, i.e., of an issue being tackled around the world through governance tools that are developed at the global level and then passed on to the national and local levels (de Búrca et al., 2013; Uzelgun & Castro, 2015). This type of global governance requires the new meaning – i.e. values, norms, information – incorporated in the new policies to travel from more global to subsequently more local levels. It moreover requires the new meaning to travel from the legal/policy spheres to the consensual, everyday, national and local universes (Castro & Mouro, 2011; Uzelgun & Castro, 2015).

In this context, the role of environmental and climate activists and campaigners in advancing new policies and new meaning is a crucial one. Activists and campaigners, engaging in the public debate through going to climate demonstrations, doing NGO work, or defending environmental protection in everyday conversations, are placed in

central positions for mediating between levels and universes. Through their formal discourses in international and national meetings but also through their informal communicative practices they contribute for new meaning and new actions to filter into everyday contexts and social relations.

However, in both their mundane conversations and more formal discourses, activists and campaigners can defend very different ideas and courses of action. They can argue for *weak* or *strong* versions of sustainability, a central distinction in the environmental domain (Dobson, 1996; Dryzek, 2005; Kashima, Paladino & Margetts, 2014; Uzzell & Rathzell, 2009). The *weak* version, entailing a *moderate* type of social change, claims that market forces and technology can bring about a sustainable society (Douglas & Wildavski, 1992), assumes production is a neutral process simply responsive to demand, and that achieving social change means mainly remodelling the behaviour of individuals and altering lifestyles (Uzzell & Rathzel, 2009; Castro, 2012). The *strong* sustainability version, in contrast, maintains the critical vision inherited from the environmental movement of the 1970s (see Dobson, 1996; Castro, 2006), demanding a fundamental transformation of current relations of production and consumption, contesting the workings of the free market and fully refusing the assumption that there is a power balance between producers and consumers (Uzzell & Rathzell, 2009; Mol & Spaargaren, 2000). This more *radical* version of social change thus defends *changing society* beyond simple adaptation (Dryzek, 2005).

The divide between *weak* and *strong* environmentalism opens up a wide space for debate and re-signification, showing that sustainability in general, and CC adaptation in particular, are goals that – although governed by globally accepted treaties and regulations – have many areas where consensus is fragile, and regarding which the "battle of ideas" (Moscovici & Markova, 2000) is constant. In turn, this opens different argumentative options for activists. At this juncture, then, a better psycho-social understanding of everyday environmental politics under conditions of global governance crucially requires exploring such aspects as (1) whether activists of the CC cause seem to argue for more moderate or more radical versions of sustainability and courses of action, and whether they are using confrontational or conciliatory arguments for that; (2) and whether those individuals who argue for *strong* or radical social change are more or less positively viewed than those defending more *moderate* options.

Studying communication and argumentation

For addressing this type of questions we need theories offering concepts useful for linking the new meaning produced in specialized or reified universes – such as the policy ones – to the everyday contexts of communication and argumentation. The Theory of Social Representations (TSR) (Moscovici, 1976), the Rhetorical Approach (Billig, 1999) and Argumentation Theory (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004) offer some of these. Together they provide important contributions for understanding how everyday conversations take up and help shape the transformation of new political and policy meaning while it travels from global to local contexts.

Social representational analyses of how new meaning travels in society identified different communicative genres (Moscovici, 1976). The initial analyses, focusing on the mass-media, showed how in the communicative genre of *propagation* a complex process of conciliation and accommodation of old and new meanings takes place, transforming both; in *propaganda*, in turn, a dichotomic world is depicted by arguments organized to highly agree with one set of beliefs and to highly disagree with another (Moscovici, 1976). These different genres are also expressed in "conversation at the interpersonal level" (Moscovici & Marková, 2000, p. 402; Castro, 2006), relying upon different small words, like conjunctions (Billig, 1999), and different formats (Castro, 2006). Propagation relies on the 'yes-but' concessive format (e.g., '*yes, CC is a serious problem, but we are already doing a lot to solve it'*), instrumental for conciliation (Uzelgun et al., 2015). *Propaganda* uses the 'yes/no' contrasting format (e.g., '*yes, we need to act upon CC now, no, there is no time for compromises'*), closing down space for negotiation and conciliation (Castro, 2006).

Taking these concepts to empirical use in the CC debate, we present in this chapter two studies aiming to contribute to a better understanding of the everyday politics of conversations about change. The first study specifically explores the interpersonal consequences of individuals supporting more or less radical options. Recent studies about feminist and environmental activism suggest that individuals tend to associate radical or 'typical' activists with negative stereotypes, devaluing them, and being less influenced by them than by moderate activists (Bashir et al., 2013). These studies fail however to clarify what will happen in the long run to the influence of radical activists, an important issue, since classical studies of minority influence

(Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969) show that radical messages, although less influential in the short term, can be more influential in the long term. These studies fail also to explore another important short-term issue: whether activists describing a more radical position are more de-valued on the dimension of *competence* or on the dimension of *warmth*, as these are identified by the Stereotype Content Model (Russell & Fiske, 2008).

Study 1 specifically explores this later question. Consequently, the study clarifies Bashir et al. (2013) findings, by 'breaking' the stereotypes associated with activists in the two basic dimensions of the SCM, so as to examine in which of them are radical and moderate activists more negatively seen. It also extends previous research by looking at how the global divide between *weak* and *strong* environmentalism enters the everyday politics of interpersonal representations.

The second study examines the arguments of committed campaigners from Environmental NGOs (ENGOs) when these respond – in the context of an interview - to the (radical) objections and critiques that a (fellow) activist poses to moderate or *weak* options for CC adaptation. It is explored if the activists respond by using the confrontational arguments of propaganda, or the negotiated, mitigated ones of propagation. By looking at these questions we extend previous research by looking at how the global (political) divide between *weak* and *strong* environmentalism enters the everyday politics through the argumentation strategies of members from crucial mediating systems in CC, the ENGOs.

After presenting each study we will discuss them together.

Study 1. Defending radical change: How are environmental activists seen?

As mentioned, the variety of environmental positions is usually organized by differentiating between *weak* and *strong* sustainability, one advocating for 'radical' and another for 'moderate' change (Dobson, 1990; Dryzek, 2005; Kashima, et al., 2014). The *radical* tendency proposes profound transformations in the economical and socio-political organisation of our societies, while a more *moderate* view proposes individualized solutions based in a managerial approach and a remodelling of individual behaviours (Uzzell & Rathzel, 2009), that some call *mundane* environmentalism (Kashima, Paladino, & Margetts, 2014).

In this context, different types of environmental actions are open to individuals. Stern (2000) proposes the following systematization of environmental actions, organized according to how public and radical their support for sustainability is: activist behaviours, non-activist, or moderate, behaviours of the public sphere, and private sphere behaviours.

Activist behaviours. These involve "movements to move forward in the face of inertia and active resistance" (Stern et al., 1999, p. 82) and concern those behaviours intending to alter the way society deals with environmental issues. These behaviours include the direct involvement with environmental associations and public demonstrations (Stern, 2000).

Moderate activist behaviours of the public sphere. These correspond to "political activities that are less public or present less risk than engaged activism" (Stern et al., 1999, p. 82) but which still involve public displays of support for environmental causes. Examples are writing letters to political officials, signing petitions, financially contributing to environmental movements or sharing information through social media or informal conversations. They may have indirect impact, "by influencing public policies" (Stern, 2000, p. 409), and can be taken as an expression of moderate activism.

Private sphere behaviours. These refer to household (i.e. private) behaviours that aim to reduce the direct impact of individual activities, form part of *weak* environmentalism and are fostered by current public policies: energy saving practices, home insulation, waste recycling. Such behaviours "have environmentally significant impact *only in the aggregate*" (Stern, 2000, p. 410), and are a widely accepted, '*mundane*' form of environmentalism (Kashima et al., 2014).

As mentioned, Bashir and colleagues (2013) found that individuals involved in radical activist behaviours are seen through negative stereotypes (e.g. tree-hugger, hippie, etc.). However, their study does not attempt to 'break' the evaluation of the radical activists in the two basic *competence* and *warmth* dimensions identified by the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) (Fiske et al., 2002). These two dimensions of interpersonal (Russell & Fiske, 2008) or intergroup perception (Fiske et al., 2002) have also been seen as informative of the dimensions of *agency* and status (*competence)* or cooperation and altruism (*warmth*) (Fiske et al., 2002; Russell & Fiske, 2008). The association of these two basic dimensions with characteristics related with the relative

position of social groups in society is what justifies our interest in resorting to this model to better understand social change. For example, the perception of *competence* (measured with traits like intelligent, capable), was seen to be associated with an individual or group's socioeconomic status (Fiske et al., 2002) as well as with their concrete agentic capacity to achieve an end or goal. And the perception of *warmth* (measured with traits like friendly, warm) was seen to be associated with an individual or group's degree of cooperation for the common good, perceived closeness, or (lack of) competition (Fiske et al., 2002; Russell & Fiske, 2008; Wojciszke, Abele, & Baryla, 2009). In this sense, *warmth* can be taken as an indicator of the extent to which an individual is prepared to cooperate for upholding a certain social order. Consequently, drawing from this model, activists expressing *strong* environmentalism, should be socially de-valued in terms of *warmth* but not *competence*.

For examining these ideas we compared the evaluation of individuals saying that they adopted different types of pro-environmental behaviours – activist, moderate/non-activist and private sphere behaviours (Stern, 2000) – in terms of competence and warmth (see Bertoldo, 2014). Drawing from SCM (Fiske et al., 2002), we expected: (1) all individuals to be equally perceived as *competent*, given that they explicitly affirm their intentions through behaviours – an *agentic* expression of their orientations (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007); (2) individuals displaying the radical activist behaviour to be perceived as *less warm* than the others, given that the goal of radical social change behind activist behaviours makes them regarded as less cooperative and less communal (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), characteristics associated with the *warmth* dimension. We also examine which individuals – radical activists, moderate activists and individuals that perform the private sphere behaviours – are more valued on the dimension of *competence* as compared to that of *warmth*.

Method

Participants were 177 first-year Psychology students from the Lisbon University Institute (ISCTE-IUL). They were 20.96 (17-42, *SD* = 4.2) years old in average and 87.5% female. They responded to an online questionnaire where vignettes describing statements of individuals reporting five different behaviours were randomly presented. The individual's gender was not specified, and the vignettes described the behaviours as

offered in response to a question posed by a TV reporter in the streets, during Earth-Day: "*And you, what do you do for the environment*?" (see Table 1).

Table 1. ***Vignettes in which individuals describe different pro-environmental behaviours.***

Type of behaviour		**Response to the question "***and you, what do you do for the environment***?"**
Public sphere	1. Activist	I am an activist in an environmental association that defends radical changes in the way our society deals with environmental protection. Whenever I can, I also take part in demonstrations aiming to change environmental politics.
	2. Moderate activist	I sign petitions related with environmental protection or with carbon reduction. Whenever I can, I pay those carbon-offset taxes.
Private sphere	3. Organic purchase	When I go shopping I prefer buying organic fruits and vegetables to regular ones.
	4. Recycling	In my house I separate the paper, glass and packages to deposit them later in the appropriate containers.
	5. Water and energy saving	I avoid as much as I can to waste energy and water at home. I always turn domestic appliances off so that they are not left in 'stand by' mode. I also tend to always turn off the lights in the divisions where nobody is.

Participants were asked to read the response and form an image of the person who gave it. Then they were asked to *judge* this person on the traits composing the dimensions of *competence* (capable, intelligent, and competent, $\alpha = .84$) and *warmth* (good person, friendly, warm, cheerful and tolerant, $\alpha = .73$) using a scale from 1 (not characteristic at all) to 7 (very characteristic) (for details see Bertoldo, 2014).

Results

Two one-way anovas were performed on the scores of competence and warmth. Results show that all individuals are similarly evaluated in terms of competence ($F(4,172) = 1.77, p = ns$), but differentiated in terms of warmth ($F(4,172) = 2.87, p < .05, \eta_{p2} = .06$). Post-hoc tests indicate that the differences found mainly concern the person attesting an activist behaviour (seen as the least warm) and the person who recycles (seen as the warmest) (see Table 2). Scores of competence and warmth were also directly compared across conditions (Student's *t* test). Individuals presenting activist ($t(33) = 4.96, p < .001$), organic purchase ($t(35) = 3.50, p < .01$) and water/energy

saving behaviours ($t(34) = 3.48$, $p < .01$) were seen as *more competent than warm*. Equivalent levels of competence and warmth were attributed to the individuals describing moderate activist and recycling behaviours.

Table 2. *Differences between the competence and warmth attributed to the individuals describing different types of pro-environmental behaviours.*

	Activist		Moderate activist		Organic purchase		Recycling		Water & energy saving	
	M	*DP*	*M*	*DP*	*M*	*DP*	*M*	*DP*	*M*	*DP*
Compet.	5.03	1.57	4.36	1.36	5.05	1.43	5.08	1.60	5.18	1.30
Warmth	3.89[a]	1.17	4.34[a,b]	1.08	4.37[a,b]	1.09	4.79[b]	1.03	4.38[a,b]	1.03

a, b: difference between the means as measured by the Scheffe post-hoc test: means classified under the same letter are not statistically different.

These results show then that individuals are not, as expected, differentiated in terms of *competence*, the dimension that is associated with agency. They are however differentiated in the *warmth* dimension, the one associated with degree of cooperation for the common good, or with the established social norms and representations (Bertoldo, 2014). Individuals describing activist behaviours and *strong* environmentalism are seen as less warm in relation to individuals presenting recycling behaviours (private sphere, weak environmentalism), seen as warmer. Furthermore, and unlike moderate activists, they are seen as *more competent than warm*.

Discussion

This first study sought to understand in which of the two basic interpersonal evaluation dimensions (*competence* and *warmth*) are radical environmental activists – i.e., those ostensibly calling for radical change and presenting activist behaviours - more devalued. Results show that they are valued in the competence dimension - they are seen both as *competent*, and as *more competent than warm* - and somehow devalued in the *warmth* dimension. We interpret this as a social penalization for failing to uphold a certain social order, challenging established norms and social representations (see Bertoldo, 2014) and thus see this results as extending Bashir et al.'s (2013) analysis in a more social way. One limitation of the study is the fact that the gender of the individual acting was not specified. Considering that women usually display higher environmental

attitudes than men (Félonneau & Becker, 2008), taking this aspect in consideration could constitute an interesting clue for future research.

Now that we have shown that radical activists are seen as less warm, although competent, and suggested a possible psychosocial justification for this pattern, let us ask whether the discourse of activists themselves avoids choosing (too) radical arguments and formats, which can be taken as a sign of an awareness of these processes. We now turn to investigating how climate activists communicate their concerns.

Study 2. Striving to be moderate? Environmental NGO activists on climate change solutions

In their emergence phase, environmental concerns were organised as a *radical* 'counter-culture' (Castro, 2006; Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Laessoe, 2007). However, when, during the 1970s and 1980s, the growing environmental concern of the public was institutionalised through (moderate) public policies, Ministries and laws, and the green movements faced a decisive moment (Castro, 2012; Laessoe, 2007). They could choose to integrate the (*moderate*) environmental policy decisions and forums (Jamison, 1996) or to stay outside, remaining more radical but excluded from most decision-making. To be considered serious actors and to gain legitimacy in national and international policy processes, ENGOs then chose to become more professional, more scientific, and less 'ideological' (Yearley, 1996).

In this context, concerns with how to achieve and maintain their legitimacy vis-à-vis the global social and policy norms are crucial aspect of the current communication efforts of activist organisations. Many authors suggest that an NGO's legitimacy rests upon their acknowledgement of the broader, and pre-existent, legitimizing norms and discourses (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Bernstein, 2011). This is also implied by the previous study. In terms of the theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1976) this means that polemic public interventions characterised by direct confrontation and dichotomic depictions of the problems – i.e., a propaganda type of oppositional *yes/no* communication - are likely to be avoided. To examine whether this is the case, this study focuses on a controversy about the utility of carbon offsetting mechanisms.

Carbon offsetting – paying a small percentage to compensate the carbon emissions created by one's consumption (for instance, by financing the plantation of

trees as "carbon sinks") – is presented as a (*moderate*) solution against CC from a *weak* sustainability perspective. For its supporters, it is a way to "undo" one's carbon emissions. From a *strong* sustainability perspective, carbon offsetting is criticised for perpetuating hegemonic policy agendas that fail to engage with (unequal) relations of production (Uzzell & Rathzel, 2009) and sustainable habits (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008). In this sense, it is a non-activist, consumer-based mechanism that depends on private sphere behaviours, as others from our first study, above presented. In this second study, we aim to examine how climate activists and committed campaigners from ENGOs argue about and represent the controversial policy of carbon offsetting, when challenged and supported by the arguments of an activist arguing for radical change.

Video-elicitation interviews: Instigating argumentation

As part of a larger study on CC communication, (N=22) interviews with non-governmental CC campaigners from Portugal and Turkey were conducted. The participants were members of a variety of ENGOs that are active in CC communication and action in the two countries, as well as transnationally, and are thus actors of a global governance regime. They were presented with a series of short video-excerpts selected so as to offer confrontational arguments. Our assumption was that the people featured in the video-excerpts would be the main argumentative opponents of the interviewees (Uzelgun, 2014).

Here we focus exclusively on the video-excerpt that features a climate activist who contests the usefulness of carbon-offset mechanisms[1]. In it, the climate activist endorses a *strong* version of social-ecological change. He argues that climate action should aim for "*more profound systemic changes in the way we organise our societies and economies*", and "*moving away from the growth based model, reigning in the corporate self-interest*". Such (counter-hegemonic) political options are by him contrasted with carbon offsetting, "*a fictitious commodity*" that has been "*created to exploit the rising levels of climate consciousness*". Importantly, however, in arguing against "*placing all of the responsibility on individual consumers*" the activist uses a concessive format: "*I think personal lifestyles have a role to play in how we respond to*

[1] The video-excerpt used can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk9Ev91jjQ8, starting from the beginning to 02′20″ (duration 2 minutes 20 seconds)

climate change, but I think our choices as individuals are still very limited in the context of climate change". Through this '*yes-but*' concession, the activist both recognises the potential contributions of the changes in personal lifestyles, and their limits. Following from study 1, we expected the two oppositions that he resorts to – carbon offsetting vs. collective political action, individual vs. systemic changes – to instigate argumentation characterised by mitigated claims, indirect disagreements and negotiation of the available options.

In analysing the arguments that address the claims made in the video-excerpt, we employed the basic tenets of Argumentation Theory (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004; see Uzelgun et al., 2015), and the Theory of Social Representations (Moscovici, 1976). Attention was specifically paid to the use of discourse markers (e.g. but, so, still), salient argumentative forms (e.g. yes/no, yes-but) and functions (e.g. concession, dichotomisation), which were linked to the genres of communication (e.g. propaganda, propagation). Once the salient argumentative forms were identified, about 10% of the corresponding arguments were reconstructed following the procedures described in van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004)[2]. As demonstrated with examples in the following section, this reconstruction makes it possible to see the social and dialogical functions of the argumentative moves carried out by the interviewees, and the representation of the carbon offsetting controversy in the propaganda and propagation genres.

Analysis

A salient feature of the arguments used by our interviewees to address the claims made by the climate activist (henceforth, the activist) was their concessive form. This form was functional in mitigating the disagreements over the uses of carbon offsets, and moderating the activist's discourse on the incompatibility of (consumer-based) private and public-political efforts. Here is a short example:

Example 1, Interview 16

[2] These procedures involve, in summary, *deletion* of those parts of the discourse that are not relevant to the difference of opinion at stake, *addition* of those parts that are relevant but are held implicit, *substitution* of ambiguous expressions by clear ones, and *permutation* of parts of the discourse in a way that brings out the best of their relevance to the argumentative process.

> I'd say that I half agree with him. We certainly need to move on to community efforts, eeh, however we should not despise either individual efforts, eeh, or the economics of the problem. Because that's what make most business and most people think. So, I think we have to do both.

The *yes-but* conceding format used here (rather than a *yes/no* contrasting format characteristic of propaganda) was a determining characteristic of the interviews, and it can be simplified as follows:

1 We have to pursue both community and individual efforts
  1.1a (Yes) We certainly need to move onto community efforts
  1.1b (However) We should not despise individual and economic efforts
    1.1b.1 Individual and economic efforts are what make most business and most people think

In this example, the interviewee addresses the claims made by the activist only indirectly, by employing an agreement preface (Pomerantz 1984; Billig, 1991). It shows that this initial affirmative clause (1.1a) is functional in appropriating the point made by the opponent: The interviewee represents it as "the need to move onto community efforts", in a way that conceals the claims made about the "growth-based model" and "corporate self-interest". Once such claims are reconstructed in a more easily acceptable form and acknowledged, the disagreement follows: "We should not despise" individual efforts (1.1b). Notably, the "we should not despise" argument is here a second-order claim through which the interviewee actively criticises the use of a propaganda-type, confrontational discourse in the CC debate.

In the conclusion (marked by *so*), the interviewee emphasises that "we have to do both". He thus effectively replaces the *yes/no* opposition of propaganda he picks out from the activist's discourse, by a yes-but propagation format. In doing this, he reconciles what was presented to him as two contradictory poles, presenting his position at equal distance to both. In sum, the conflict generated by the activist between the private-sphere and public-political "efforts" is eliminated, providing reasons (1.1b.1). Notably, these reasons explicitly appeal to the majority view, i.e. the dominant or hegemonic meaning systems.

The next excerpt is an example of those arguments in which the position of the interviewee is slightly inclined towards one of the poles, in countering the claims made in the video-excerpt:

Example 2, Interview 8:

> As a person, I had my doubts, and I'm sceptical about carbon trading, but I don't agree with, in that sense, I... I think still human lifestyle changes do matter. Unlike him, I mean, he... I understand he is trying, because he is trying to make a point, and he's focusing more on the systematic, systemic changes, obviously, that part I agree. That's why I'm focused on international change, these are you know, or governmental, national levels. There has to be, you know, rules, regulations, applying big business, related to everything... but at the end of the day, I think, humans, I mean, as persons each of us, changing our lifestyles you know doing... respecting and doing more things, saving energy, changing, these are important.

As in the previous example, the interviewee offers an initial agreement as preface, and only then raises her counter point, reconstructed as 1.1b below:

1 Personal lifestyle changes are important in mitigating climate change
- 1.1a (Yes) I'm (also) sceptical about carbon trading
- 1.1b (But) Still, personal lifestyle changes do matter

Then she "understands" the point the activist is trying to make, and claims that it is what she is doing by focusing on international change. Another *yes-but* concessive construction follows: In the affirmative clause, she concedes that "there has to be... rules, regulations, applying [to] big business". In the but-clause, "changing our lifestyles" as persons, "respecting", and "saving energy" are defended against the claims imputed to the activist:

1 Personal lifestyle changes are important in mitigating climate change
- 1.2a (Yes) Focusing on systemic changes is important
- 1.2b (Yes) There has to be international and national level rules, regulations for big business
- 1.2c (But) Personal changes in our lifestyles are (as) important

In order to emphasise the rhetorical aspect of the manoeuvring carried out here, it is crucial to identify the argumentative relations between the activist's and the interviewee's points. The argument conceding the need for regulations (1.2b) does not actually represent an argument raised by the activist. It rather draws on an implication of the activist's argument about "com[ing] together in communities, to start organizing, to create political pressure for the bigger systemic changes that need to happen". The interviewee interprets this implication in the framework of international and national level "regulations". More critically, against the activist's criticism of carbon offsets, the

interviewee argues that "changing our lifestyles" is important (1.2c). Thereby, she represents the case of the activist as being *against* changes in individual lifestyles. However, the activist's claim against carbon offsets rests upon characterizing them as offering "peace of mind", an obstacle against change. By doing a not very charitable interpretation of the activist's case (see Lewiński, 2012) the interviewee cuts out the confrontational elements from the activist's discourse in a way that opens up space for arguing in a conciliatory way, in favour of the use of carbon offsets.

Let us now turn to a third example, in which the interviewee tends to agree with the activist.

Example 3, Interview 6:

> Yes I agree with him. Eeh, <u>but maybe one point</u>. Eeh, I wouldn't say I don't believe in carbon offsets, but, as he mentions, carbon offset is being promoted as a eeh, thing that is really tricky. And as he said it is eeh making people think that ok, I will buy a plane ticket and pay 5 dollars more, and somewhere in the world a tree whatever, might be eeh put in place, oh now I'm relieved, because I paid my 5 dollars. And it's not really individual action that can save the world, that I believe. However, <u>carbon offsets eeh can be used as a mechanism</u>, if it were to be, eh used in a holistic way.

In this example, after a first signal of agreement the interviewee goes on to contend <u>not that she believes</u> in carbon offsets, but instead that she is <u>not against</u> carbon offsets. She endorses a series of arguments offered by the activist, specifying her points of agreement with him. Looking there, we can say she indeed agrees with him. "However", she then reprises the "one point" signalled at the beginning and arrives at the conclusion that *carbon offsets can be used as a mechanism*, if they are used in a *in a holistic way*. That is, instead of dismissing the potential utility of carbon offsetting, the interviewee strives to assign conditions for its use, in a way to open space for offering conciliatory, propagation-like, arguments. Her argumentation resembles that of interviewee 16 (the first example), in that it tends to raise a second-order criticism about how CC mitigation efforts are communicated ("I wouldn't say…").

A similar, but more implicit, evaluative component characterises also our last example:

Example 4, Int. 20:

> Eeh.. he's saying that... well this... collective action is needed, it's not individual, basically. I mean basically he's saying that carbon offsetting, which eeh, which is a way supposedly to, eh, pay for neutralising your emissions, whether that's in personal or corporate level, is actually not neutralising

> them. And again the science is probably a little bit more grey than that. There is some neutralisation happening, I mean, carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases... some of them do cycle, they are absorbed, and they are reabsorbed and reemitted. But, eh, it's, it's not complete enough, I mean it's not like.. 99% of them getting reabsorbed and only 1% is leaking. There's probably a huge amount that aren't (...). So, I think he's grossly speaking correct, eh, it's been hugely unregulated still, and even when it is regulated, the regulation structures have... tended towards being very permissive.

In the first sentence of this excerpt, the criticism of the activist is represented as located in the opposition between "collective" and "individual" levels of action; and as he is credited with saying that carbon offsetting does not work (does not actually neutralise) at both levels, the interviewee disagrees. Importantly, her disagreement is mitigated by the use of qualifiers: "a bit more grey" and "there is some neutralisation happening". In other words, she disagrees with the activist's claim only to some extent. As in the foregoing example, her criticism targets the way the claims are communicated, namely in *yes/no* (black-and-white) oppositions, instead of in a *grey zone* of conciliation. That she does not reject the activist's claim becomes obvious in the succeeding part of the excerpt, where she concludes that "he's grossly speaking correct", since regulation structures of offsetting mechanisms tend towards being too permissive, and there is probably a huge amount that is not neutralized.Through this shift between the contested positions, and negotiating the amount that is "neutralised", she manages to convert a *yes/no* type of confrontation into a *yes-but* type of reconciliatory criticism.

After the discourse marker *so*, the interviewee announces the problem as carbon offsetting still being hugely unregulated, arguing that regulation structures tend towards being too permissive, in support of the activist's "grossly correct" position. Hence, she represents and reiterates the activist's case by removing the main confrontational element (carbon offsets do not neutralise anything), and providing more moderate reasons. As in the vast majority of the arguments that respond to the video-excerpt, in her agreement with the activist's argument for radical social change, she refrains from confronting the policy norm (carbon offsets can be used to counter CC), transforming an oppositional discourse into a concessional, reconciliatory one.

Discussion

This study has explored the dialogical and social functions of the conciliatory argumentative formats that were saliently used by ENGO activists in the dispute on the utility of carbon offsets. As shown by exemplary excerpts, through *yes-but* conceding formats it becomes possible to recognise the views of an argumentative partner that expresses counter-hegemonic views, transforming, criticising, and in this case *moderating* them, while upholding one's views (Moscovici, 1976; Billig, 1991). Notably, although the discourse of argumentative partner (the climate activist) involved both confrontational (yes/no) and concessional (yes-but) elements, our interviewees have mainly focused on the confrontational, non-hegemonic ones, precisely to reinterpret and transform them into concessional forms. They strived to eliminate the conflicts, to avoid oppositions, dichotomies, and disagreement both with the activist who argued for radical social-ecological change, and with the 'milder', i.e., more moderate, proposals for socio-economic change.

The organising principles of such manoeuvring were the *prefacing* of disagreements, the *restraining* of one's claims and *mitigation* of the perceived conflict, in relation to issues of self-presentation, and politeness (e.g. Holtgraves, 1997; Sifianou, 2013). It is well established that the rhetorical power of formal and expert discourse (Sifianou, 2013; Baber & Bartlett, 2005) owes to the recognition of the perspectives of others, and to the balanced consideration of options. However, this is only a starting point for interpreting complex political controversies such as this one, and explanations can also be sought at the societal, not just the interactional, level.

Concerning the societal level, our focus was on whether ENGOs members would go along with the radical discourse of a fellow activist in arguing against the hegemonic discourses on carbon offsetting. This was an indirect way of exploring if their arguments might exhibit signs of awareness of the negative stereotypes attributed to activists. Seeing that our interviewee's strived to avoid confrontational, all-or-nothing arguments, refraining from direct disagreements with both sides of the controversy, we can say that their communication efforts are characterised by *propagation* of alternatives, rather than *propaganda* of one strongly supported choice. In many instances, instead of arguing for radical change, they argued *against arguing for radical change*, issuing second-order criticisms concerning the confrontational elements in the presented argument. In terms of the foregoing study, their *everyday political behaviour*

can thus be depicted as concerned with offering a self-image (as an active minority) as *warm* and upholding *cooperative intentions*, and in view of these, as non-partisan, reasonable parties to the global policy debate on CC.

Conclusion

In the two studies here presented we brought together contributions from social and environmental psychology and first showed that individuals who are represented as wishing to radically change society are regarded with negative stereotypes affecting warmth-related traits. We took this as an indication that radical proposals for change are seen as violating cooperative expectations. Then we showed that the discourse on CC solutions of ENGOs members seems to refrain from radical, confrontational, propaganda-like, arguments. We interpreted this as suggesting that this discourse is possibly showing awareness of the negative stereotypes of radicals, and seeks to reflect a cooperative image. Hence, the conjunction of the two studies seems to indicate that, in dealing with the "battle of ideas" in climate policy and discourse, activists would better – and indeed do – avoid strong disagreements and oppositions.

This seems in line with Giddens' (2009) proposition that all actors of climate policy need to work with the 'geopolitical realities' and economic exigencies, rather than work against them by choosing a one-sided focus on risks and 'boundaries of nature'. However, if the option of recognising the geopolitical realities affords a certain level of legitimacy and warmth to ENGO campaigners, it also seems to make them enter the debate with the rather consensual arguments of *weak* change, incompetent to a certain degree in challenging the dominant policy agendas.

In summary, then, ENGO's active in the CC debate seem to be caught in the dilemma of trying to achieve radical change by using moderate arguments, avoiding being seen as un-cooperative. This means that they might be placing themselves, through this strategy, in a position of also avoiding provoking the "cognitive conflict" that according to the Genetic Model is necessary for private "conversion in the long-term", and focusing on obtaining public "compliance in the short term" (Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969). This Model shows that minority "individuals and groups that *innovate* exercise influence by creating or increasing conflict". In striving to establish a new norm, such a minority may choose to refuse compromises and maintain

a “constant pressure” with the goal to “wring concessions from the majority” (Moscovici, 1985, p. 21). On the other hand, individuals, groups and institutions that aspire to fully generalise a new norm that already gathers some consensus tend to avoid “the prospect of conflict and its potential repercussions” (idem, p .19) via compromises, with a view of progressively achieving a fuller “consensus which satisfies everyone” (idem, p. 19).

Todays’ moderate options of CC campaigners, in their role as carriers of global meaning to national and local contexts, can be thus contributing “to re-absorb” the conflicts previously created by the innovating minority groups (Moscovici, 1985, p. 21). Moderate options that avoid setting the scenery for a more difficult and more prolonged debate can be seen to favour – in the organisation of their everyday politics – a debate oriented to the short term, “confined primarily to the period of social interaction” (idem, p. 33). This orientation to the short term, together with the avoidance of open conflict and the concomitant use of hegemonic arguments in order to oppose hegemonic goals may be one of a multiplicity of aspects that may help explain the situation we highlighted in the beginning of this text - i.e., why certain social transformations that are to a large extent socially accepted and seen as desirable, continuously fail to happen, or at best progress very slowly. As authors of the present text, we would consequently argue that a more difficult debate, which does not avoid conflict and does use arguments carrying counter-hegemonic meaning, is much needed regarding climate change.

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