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The local impact of global climate change: reporting on landscape transformation and threatened identity in the English regional newspaper press

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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to extant understandings of media representations of climate change by examining the role of the English regional newspaper press in the transformation and dissemination of climate change discourse. Unlike previous accounts, we contend that such newspapers shape public understandings of climate change in ways that have yet to be adequately charted. With this in mind, this paper examines the ways in which global climate change is translated into a locally relevant phenomenon. That is, it focuses on its 'domestication'. Although we acknowledge that there are a number of ways in which this process occurs, specific attention is drawn to stories that highlight the destruction of local landscape features, the transformation of important habitats, and the arrival of 'alien' species. The broader significance of such stories is considered in relation to long-standing debates concerning the importance of landscape to notions of national and regional identity.

Key words: climate change, global warming, regional newspapers, landscape, identity

Introduction - Diversity in climate change reporting

While the exact nature and impacts of current global climate change remain contested, a scientific and political consensus is emerging around the idea that the continued consumption of fossil fuels and the concurrent rise in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are resulting in tangible changes to the climate (although as recent events surrounding the Copenhagen climate summit demonstrate this consensus remains fragile). Corbett and Durfee (2004), amongst many others, have suggested the media perform an important role in shaping public understandings of the science underpinning climate change. Numerous scholars have attempted to comprehend how different media genres, from newspaper articles to television reports, shape public understandings of the phenomenon. As Beck (1992) recognised, the media contribute to the bridging of scientific, public and political platforms and, as a forum for debate, play a key part in the production, transformation, and dissemination of scientific knowledge. Moreover, as Gamson (1999) suggests, the media acts as an important ‘validator’ of scientific information, as reporters and editors make continual judgements on whose voice is heard and how that voice is (re)presented. Much useful work has explored the scientific ‘accuracy’ of media reports (Bell 1994), the ways in which scientific stories, for example on environmental risks, are reported (Major and Atwood 2004), and the issue-attention cycle of individual news stories (Trumbo 1996; McCormas and Shanahan 1999).

A great deal of the research into the print media focuses on titles that are bracketed as ‘quality’ or ‘prestige’ newspapers in the belief that their reporting is more ‘reliable’ and, consequently, their discourse more ‘important’ (Sparks 1987). This picture is reflected to an extent in research that focuses explicitly on climate change (see Trumbo 1996; Mazur 1998; Boycoff and Boycoff 2004; Carvalho 2005). In a UK context, this has resulted in detailed studies of the content and

ideological standpoints of daily broadsheet newspapers, such as the *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Times*, and, less frequently, the *Daily Telegraph*, and of their Sunday equivalents (see for example Carvalho 2007). While appreciating that broadsheet titles, and to a lesser extent tabloids (see Boykoff 2008; Boykoff and Mansfield 2008), may, indeed, perform an important agenda-setting function, and are “preferred by politicians and other decision-makers” (Carvalho 2007: 226), we raise the possibility in this paper that regional or local newspapers also play an important role in helping to shape public understandings of climate change.

Defining the ‘regional’ or ‘local’ newspaper press is, of course, a difficult task and is one that is made all the more so by the variance that exists between different national contexts. For example, while there are clear equivalences between US ‘prestige’ newspapers and national broadsheets in the UK, the former, which includes such titles as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, might equally be regarded as ‘local’ newspapers; especially if it is considered that each of these retains at least the vestiges of their metropolitan newspaper heritage, have sections reporting on ‘local’ news, and publish, or at least have published, daily or weekly editions that are explicitly ‘national’ in focus. To some extent this problem with distinguishing regional or local newspapers from national ones is also apparent in the UK. As Franklin and Murphy (1998) contend, historically the local and regional newspaper press covered national and international stories sourced from independent news agencies as well as the local stories with which they are often connected. In this sense, then, they not only provided a predominantly local readership with stories that related to their immediate vicinity but they also drew their attention to key national and international issues of the day.

It is perhaps difficult to argue that the local and regional press continue to perform this function. After all, it is undoubtedly the case that the character of the local and regional newspaper press,

in the UK as elsewhere, has changed significantly in the past fifty years and perhaps even that the “local newspapers are local in name only” (Franklin 2006: xxi). It is also true that the readership of such newspapers is in decline and that they have to compete with many other providers of news stories; notably here the internet. While this may be so, we demonstrate in this paper that there remains an editorial commitment to the coverage of a wide-range of local through to global issues, of which climate change is but one. Further, this commitment, though in many instances over reliant on external sources of copy (on which see Franklin 2006), is reasonably expansive and covers issues such as climate change from a range of different perspectives. This alone provides a justification for the particular focus of this paper.

However, this is not the only aspect of the paper that sets it apart from current scholarship in this area; its analytical focus is another. More specifically, the analysis that follows recognises that, as the wider implications of global climate change have become more apparent, and perhaps more tangible, the range of voices drawn upon by the newspaper media has become ever more diverse. Further, the frames that are employed to make the phenomenon of global climate change knowable and meaningful have extended into the realm of people’s everyday lives. As we go on to demonstrate, in addition to reporting on the ‘big’ climate change stories, such as those relating to reports published by key intergovernmental agencies, scientific committees or research institutions, the local and regional newspapers that we analysed also report on the ‘local’ impact of climate change: whether in relation to the local economy, the response of local government agencies, or even local weather patterns. This extension fits within the informal rules or codes that are argued to determine the ‘newsworthiness’ of a story. Put differently, the reporting of global climate change appears to be increasingly recast in terms of its broader cultural, economic, political, and social relevance and not just in terms of the scientific debates and controversies that surround it.

We might consider this broadening of the narrative frame through which global climate change is reported as reflecting what Gurevitch and colleagues (1991) refer to as ‘domestication’. We make this observation because a key feature of the domestication process is the way in which globally significant events, and here we would include global climate change, are rendered “comprehensible, appealing and ‘relevant’” through reference to a “narrative framework that is already familiar to and recognizable by” domestic audiences (1991: 206-7. See also Clausen 2004; Ruigrok and van Atteveldt 2007). There are many such frameworks that might be brought into play here, however of particular interest to this paper is the notion of ‘landscape’. As scholars such as Daniels (1993), Matless (1998), and Brace (1999) have revealed, national and regional identities are intimately bound up with ideas of landscape. What a place looks like, its climate and topography, the flora and fauna associated with it, and even the materials used to construct its material fabric, are all important in this regard. The question that arises here is how perceived ‘threats’ to the UK landscape associated with global climate change are reported in the newspaper press and what this reporting tell us about the continued relevance of landscape as a marker of local through to national identity?

It was, then, with these ideas in mind that we conducted an analysis of the reporting of global climate change in local and regional newspapers in the UK. In the sections that follow we expand upon each of these ideas in turn, beginning with an overview of the methods employed. Once in place, we move on to explore three related themes: global climate change as a locally relevant and meaningful phenomenon; landscape transformation and species loss; and nation and identity. We conclude with a final section that draws each of these themes together.

Method

Despite evidence of their decline in recent years, there are approximately 1300 local and regional newspapers currently in circulation in the UK (The Newspaper Society 2008). Clearly this is far too large a number for the kind of in-depth analysis that we present here, therefore a series of steps were employed to reduce this figure to a more manageable quantity. In the first instance local and regional newspapers were excluded from the study if they were not available on the Lexis UK database or were a non-English (i.e. Irish, Scottish, or Welsh) regional title. This resulted in 26 local and regional titles being identified. This number was further reduced by performing a simple content analysis. More explicitly, a search was conducted for stories, from all sections of the newspapers except reader's letters, containing the key words 'climate change' and/or 'global warming' published during the period 1997-2006 inclusive. Initially a 15-year time frame was selected on the basis that 1992 corresponded with the Rio Earth Summit, however, with the exception of the *London Evening Standard*, the coverage of many of the regional newspapers on Lexis UK only dates back to 1997. This study analyses only those titles that featured in the top ten of this content analysis (see Table 1).

*** TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE ***

As Table 1 reveals, a total of 5799 separate articles relating either to climate change or to global warming appeared in the selected newspapers. Clearly, this remains a large number of articles on which to perform detailed and in-depth discourse analysis. Therefore, each of the stories was coded further according to their secondary thematic content (their primary content being either climate change, global warming, or a combination of both). The process adopted was quite straightforward and involved assigning each story to one of ten categories: 'All science', 'Community awareness', 'Industry/business', 'International policy', 'Local impact', 'Local

protest', 'Local response', 'National policy', 'Personal interest', and 'Other'. The categories were generated following a thematic analysis of the contents of all the climate change/global warming stories that were published in one of the papers (the *London Evening Standard*) over the course of a single year (1999), although some further recoding was necessary when the original codes were applied to the entire database (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The method for assigning stories to these categories began with the analysis of individual headlines, recognising that these are the most conspicuous part of a newspaper story and tend to summarise its most important information (Bell 1998). In many cases this process was adequate for coding purposes, as the following examples illustrate: 'Climate change could turn the South-East into Bordeaux' (Local impact), 'South-East 'under water in 200 years' (Local impact), '“This government isn't saving the environment, it's just after more tax”' (National policy), 'Greens slam Meacher over 'cleaner air' claim' (National policy). However, where the secondary thematic content of a story was not immediately obvious from the headline a more in-depth reading of individual stories was required. For example, a headline such as 'London aims to host gases trade' is not explicit enough to code the article. However, reading the first few lines of the story reveals a great deal more information and in most instances allowed for appropriate coding, which in this case was 'Industry/business': 'London is vying with Chicago and Sydney to be the home of a new multibillion-pound market in the trading of credits and debits for emissions of global warming “greenhouse” gases'. Inevitably, even this approach was not appropriate to code all the articles analysed and in some instances the entire contents of a story had to be read in order for a judgement to be made.

It is, however, important to recognise that the purpose of this exercise was primarily to provide an understanding of the broad themes covered in the local and regional newspapers and to allow for the identification of those stories that focused on the principal area of interest: namely, the local impact of climate change/global warming and its framing in terms of landscape transformation and loss. Given this, we do not outline in any detail the types of stories included in all of the thematic categories. It should be noted, however, that stories covering ‘national policy’ (including inter-party, taxation, and all other policy discussion) were by far the most common, accounting for 26% of all identified stories. This was followed by ‘local impact’ stories, which accounted for 17%, and those relating to ‘industry/business’ (including impact and financial/commercial benefits of climate change) with 15%. Of the remainder, those that focussed on ‘international policy’ (10%) and ‘local response’ (10%), and, to a lesser extent, the science of climate change/global warming (7%), were the most popular themes covered. On this basis, the total number of stories that were examined in this paper represent just over one sixth ($n = 985$) of all the climate change/global warming articles that were published in the ten regional newspapers we analysed. A close inspection of Table 2 reveals that there is considerable thematic variation between the newspapers, with local impact stories representing almost one third of those published in the *Western Morning News* but only 6% of those that appeared in Liverpool’s *Daily Post*.

Though we provide supporting quantitative statements about the size and general characteristics of our sample, the main interpretive elements of the analysis that follows are framed by the idea that “[a] few exemplary extracts from relevant texts can more economically support observations than the tedious and redundant repetition of similar examples” (Lupton 1994: 31). In this sense, we do not attempt to provide an analysis of all the secondary thematic themes mentioned above. Rather, we limit our concern to the exploration of two specific research questions. Firstly, we

were interested in exploring how stories relating to the local impact of this global phenomenon were marked out as being relevant to the readership of the various local and regional newspapers. Although we recognise that a decision about their relevance had already been made by the newspapers' editors, of specific interest here was our desire to identify the ways in which events that occurred locally were constructed in relation to, as being linked with, processes associated with the impact of climate change or global warming; the most obvious examples of which are weather-related events such as floods and droughts. As we reveal, of particular interest here was the idea that the stories relating to weather events tended to rely on what we might refer to as the 'prior knowledge' of their readership in order to make this association. More explicitly, the stories used a number of strategies to distinguish or differentiate particular weather patterns, which were related to climate change/global warming, from those that the readership would regard as 'normal'. While it is important to recognise that notions of what constitutes normality, natural variability and anthropogenically-forced climate changes remain contested by climate scientists (e.g. Katz and Brown 1992; Easterling et al. 2000), local newspaper reports often used key words to signify the 'unusual' nature of specific events that occurred in places where they might not normally be expected to occur.

The second key question that we explore was driven by our recognition that the idea of landscape transformation and species loss is widely regarded as being one of a number of ways in which climate change/global warming is expected to impact on countries around the globe. As with our analysis of weather events, our approach to such stories involved identifying the key phrases that were used to signify change and examining the ways in which they built on people's everyday knowledge of the world to represent such change as in some way 'alien' to an assumed norm. In this part of our analysis our results are divided into two related sections: the first explores the question of landscape transformation and species loss and the second looks more

closely at a specific feature of this change, namely what we refer to as the ‘death of the English garden’. In the latter section we incorporate a small number of stories from the national newspaper press to illustrate our belief that the themes we have identified as important features of the local and regional press draw upon what we, like many other scholars, regard as a powerful and enduring markers of English national and regional identity; namely landscape (see for example Daniels 1993; Brace 1999; Darby 2000; Matless 2001).

Localising the ‘global’

Questions of scale have been the subject of sustained theoretical reflection both within and beyond the discipline of geography (Marston et al. 2005). Although the notion of a hierarchy of differentially sized and bounded spaces, from the global down to the local, is hard to sustain (Thrift 1995), it has proved to be a useful concept through which to explore differences that (appear to) exist at different spatial levels. It is apparent from our own reading of current literature on the subject of climate change that the scale at which this process is seen to operate is the global one. However, as our analysis reveals, it is equally apparent, especially, though not only, in the local and regional press, that supposedly global issues such as climate change are often recast in terms of their ‘local’ relevance. This process, referred to in media studies as ‘domestication’ (Gurevitch et al. 1991), takes a variety of forms and can refer to global stories that are re-narrated for a national through to local/regional audience.

We begin our analysis by considering how locally occurring events were re-cast in terms of their relationship to global climate change. By way of an example, on the day of the Stern Review’s publication on Climate Change in October 2006, London’s *Evening Standard* painted an image of the city being “at risk” as the climate became a “full 7°C hotter” (Murphy and Prynne 30

October 2006: 1). The newspaper's readership was also advised that "[o]ffices would become difficult to work in, Tube lines unbearable and the clay foundations of the city would dry out and become unstable". Though the sensationalising, or perhaps 'tabloidisation', of the Stern Review is of interest, it is the focus on its local relevance that concerns us here. For this story such relevance was related to the threat to London posed by global warming; indeed, as the report goes on to suggest, "there would be a high risk of the Thames breaking its banks as sea levels rise, with the danger that a swathe of the capital could be flooded". Clearly, there could be little more threatening than this particular apocalyptic vision of metropolitan life in 2050.

The *Evening Standard* was, of course, not alone in translating such global processes or events into locally relevant stories. This was particularly true in areas where similarly extreme events had recently been experienced and hence were already of considerable local interest and, as such, were newsworthy. For example, in the *Yorkshire Post*, emphasis was placed on exploring the apparent interrelationship between global climate change and the increased risk of flooding; with over 10% of the stories examined in this newspaper covering the issue. Given that the area covered by the *Yorkshire Post* was severely affected by the flood events affecting the UK in summer 2007, this should come as no surprise. However, what is of interest is how this story is narrated to those living within the locality. What we identify in our substantive analysis is that, although many of the stories relate to specific local issues, such as flood protection and the impact on local housing development, others seek to (re)position the area within a discourse that operates at a very different scale. One such story, written for the newspaper by Paul Hudson, a Yorkshire-based regional television weather forecaster who was recently appointed as the BBC climate correspondent, exemplifies this trend.

Though the title of the story is quite emotive, ‘For our children’s sake, we must fight climate change’, its contents seek to offer a succinct, but informed, explanation of what was referred to as “another year of great weather extremes” (Hudson 29 December 2006). Once scientific explanations for these extremes were provided, and here Hudson drew on the expertise of Sir John Houghton, former chief executive of the Met office and co-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group, the story went on to question what this might mean “for us here in Yorkshire”. The answer that Hudson provided was somewhat prescient, given the extreme flooding events that affected the area the following summer: “[w]e will see the weather swinging from one extreme to another. Areas of low pressure will become deeper; this will lead to periods of heavier rainfall and stronger winds. In turn, this will cause increased episodes of flooding and structural damage, particularly in autumn and winter”. The point we are making in referring to this story is that the reporting of global climate change is, in some instances at least, continually recast in local terms.

This style of reporting, what we might refer to as the ‘rescaling’ of global climate change discourse, is a feature of many other stories in this and the other newspapers examined. For example, where the *Yorkshire Post* focused on the threat of localised flooding, the *Birmingham Evening Mail* and *Birmingham Post* drew attention to the increased risk posed by high winds and tornados. In a reasonably early story on this issue, a special correspondent writing for the latter of these newspapers reported on moves to establish a climate change centre (what is now the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of East Anglia). What is interesting about this story is that its local relevance was based on the suggestion by the then Science Minister, Lord Sainsbury, that “[a]lthough climate change is a global phenomenon, many of its causes and impacts are *local*” (Sainsbury quoted by Brown 16 July 1999: 8. Emphasis added). At this stage, Birmingham had only experienced “[f]reak weather, like the

twister that hit the Midlands” and there was no suggestion that this would change immanently. This interest in the connection between climate change and extreme weather events remained at a relatively low level within both of these regional newspapers until 2005.

However, the appearance of a tornado in the Moseley and Balsall Heath districts of Birmingham, in July 2005, changed this picture somewhat. Though the UK-based Tornado and Storm Research Association (TORRO) claim that the UK has the highest frequency of tornadoes per unit area in the world (TORRO 2009), the *Birmingham Evening Mail* and the *Birmingham Post* unsurprisingly dedicated a considerable amount of column space to the tornado, with some fifty-plus stories being published within a three day period. Many of these stories provided personal accounts of the tornado or reported on the devastating impact it had had on some local communities, while others located it in an historical context through reference to the “Big One in 1931” (Pinch 29 July 2005). What is interesting about the stories that immediately followed this extreme weather event is that none of them mentioned climate change and only two mentioned global warming. The connection to wider scale global climatic processes was simply not made. Yet, in stories much later after the event, at a distance from it, both regional newspapers followed a similar pattern of reporting to that found in the *Yorkshire Post*. That is to say, much greater attention was focused on stories that positioned Birmingham and the West Midlands region more widely within the context of global climate change discourse.

For example, in September 2005 the *Birmingham Post* published a full-length feature that covered both the Royal Meteorological Society’s biennial conference and the Tornado and Storm Research Organisation’s annual conference (Groves 17 September 2005). This in itself gives some indication of the impact that the tornado had; after all, neither of these conferences took place in Birmingham and most of the expert attention was focused on the much more severe

weather system, hurricane Katrina, which had devastated the US city of New Orleans in August of that year. Yet, both events allowed the newspaper to draw parallels between the tornado in Birmingham, these more serious global weather events, and the broader question of climate change. In another story, this ‘rescaling’ process was further illustrated when both newspapers reported on the publication of a Wordwide Fund for Nature (WWF) report, Stormy Europe (WWF 2006), which, it was suggested, stated that “Birmingham will become one of the worst storm-ravaged cities in the UK as a result of climate change” (Probert 3 March 2006). What is interesting here is that this report was not commented upon in most of the newspapers that were analysed in this study. Moreover, despite the headlines, ‘Midland: Storms to become norm, says report’ and ‘Stormy future for Brum’, Birmingham was actually only mentioned once in the original report. More importantly perhaps, it is also worth noting that the link between increased Atlantic storminess and anthropogenic forcing has actually proved very difficult to demonstrate (von Storch and Weisse 2008).

Such attempts to re-narrate the story of climate change, to make it appear more relevant, and perhaps more ‘knowable’, to a local readership, do not only involve the positioning of a locality within the context of much broader national and international discussion relating to the threat posed by this global phenomenon. What we also find is that many of the stories make connections to it through reference to the sighting of ‘alien’ or ‘exotic’ species that are normally associated with warmer climes. In the *Western Morning News*, for example, there are stories that report on the appearance of ‘exotic’ marine creatures off the Westcountry coast: whether “Mediterranean puffer fish” (18 July 2001: 5), the “tropical surprise” of “big game barracuda” (27 November 2001: 3), West African sponge crabs (6 September 2006: 2) or “rare” leatherback turtles (9 September 2006: 27). Such sightings, though often revealed to be isolated incidents whose connection to global warming is unclear, are important because they are embedded within

a much broader narrative relating to the idea of landscape transformation and loss. It is to this narrative that we shall now turn.

Landscape transformation and species loss

In this section, we extend our reading of the regional newspaper press and focus on notions of landscape transformation and loss. We do so because the localised threats posed by global climate change noted above are not the only ways in which a seemingly global scale phenomenon was made to appear more locally relevant. As we demonstrate, what many of the stories shared was a sense in which the English, though sometimes this is written as British, landscape will be transformed by global climate change. The most obvious expressions of this transformation come in stories that offer their readership clear guidance on what this might mean: ‘Climate change could turn the South-East into Bordeaux’ (*Evening Standard*, 24 November 1999: 21), ‘Sunny outlook for the Costa del Westcountry’ (*Western Morning News*, 17 January 2001: 12), ‘West could be Everglades of Britain by 2080’ (*Western Daily Press*, 15 April 2002: 12), and ‘Magic of the Med’ (*The Journal*, 25 August 2005: 47). Within such stories we find that scientific accounts, whether published by academic institutions, government agencies or environmental organisations, are interwoven with representations of other landscapes to produce an imaginary, post-climate change English landscape: “Imagine long, hot Gallic-style summers, endless barbecues accompanied by a cheeky little plonk from the local vineyard, and all within walking distance of your own Home Counties’ doorstep” (Gill, 24 November 1999: 21).

What is especially interesting about these stories is that they highlight the ways in which this narrative relating to landscape transformation is interwoven with a sense of nostalgia. As Allan

Gill, writing in the *Evening Standard*, goes on to state, “[f]orget the traditional image of England as a “green and pleasant land”. The scenario depicts a countryside plagued by dust, insects, water shortages, scorched gardens, impoverished soil, and the disappearance of cherished woodlands. It is almost inevitable that this narrative, which relies so heavily on portrayals of the ‘traditional’, involves the construction of a binary division between those elements that are seen as belonging within, or being foreign to, the national landscape. Though evident in the illustrations that we have already provided, this is perhaps most commonly expressed in stories that refer either to the extinction or the invasion of species. For example, there are many stories that draw attention to the loss of particular species: ‘Is it the swansong in the West for some of our much-loved birds’ (*Western Daily Press*, 11 December 1998: 24-5), ‘Wildlife on the march as the climate hots up’ (*Western Daily Press*, 14 November 2001: 15), ‘Birds have flown’ (*Bristol Evening Post*, 14 June 2002: 29), ‘Native plants ‘could be lost to North’ (*The Journal*, 18 October 2004: 15) and ‘Lost species threaten countryside survival’ (*Western Morning News*, 3 November 2006: 22).

Although referring to different regional landscapes and different ‘native’ species, the link between all of these stories is the connections that they make between the two: “One of those under threat in the West is the much-loved willow tit which relies on damp woods to survive. And the large heath butterfly may be forced out of the West and head northwards if temperatures rise” (Mendham, *Western Daily Press*, 14 November 2001: 15) and “The Mountain Ringlet butterfly is one of the main species at risk. It lives in the Lake District its only location in England and if its favoured habitat disappears it will probably not find a suitable climate anywhere in Britain” (*The Journal*, 15 November 1991: 2). Moreover, as other stories in the *Western Daily Press* highlight, the loss of particular species to the national landscape is associated with having important cultural and symbolic implications: “Future generations of carol singers who sing of partridges in pear trees may never have the chance to see one. For the

grey partridge, already rare, may soon die out” (Rundle, 11 December 1998: 24) and “The skylark – immortalised by poets such as Keats, Wordsworth and Shelley – could soon be lost from Britain” (30 August 2004: 4).

Yet, as we state above, this transformation narrative does not only refer to the idea of lost species but also to the arrival of ‘alien’ ones: ‘Invasion of the alien weeds’ (*Evening Standard*, 3 April 2001: 19), ‘Exotic weeds invade’ (*Western Daily Press*, 16 March 2004: 4) and, more recently, ‘Exotic wildlife in every corner of ‘warming’ UK’ (*Birmingham Post*, 18 September 2006: 9). As these headlines suggest, a number of the stories relating to the invasion of species refer to threats posed to the national landscape by the arrival of ‘exotic’ plants and animals from outside of the UK. As one such story in the *Evening Standard* reports, the director of Kew Gardens “warned of an “alien invasion” of foreign weeds which strangle the lifeblood out of native species amid echoes of the Day of the Triffids” and that “[w]hen native plants begin to fail, animals that relied on their leaves, berries or flowers for food or shelter must look elsewhere or disappear” (Gruner, 3 April 2001: 19). Other stories, this time published in the *Western Daily Press*, report that “non-native and destructive species could survive in the UK” (Crofts, 5 September 2002: 8) and that “[t]ough Mediterranean plants are increasingly being grown by West gardeners with hot, dry summers leaving more traditional English plants wilting” (16 March 2004: 4). Perhaps unsurprisingly given the recent succession of relatively wet summers in central and southern England, we found little evidence of comments on the imposition of local hosepipe bans and/or local water shortages after 2004.

While undoubtedly important issues, these are not the only threats that are associated with global climate change. For example, there are stories that refer to its impact on the seasons and how this will affect the nation’s landscape – ‘Warmer world will steal our seasons’ (*Western Daily Press*,

5 September 2002: 8) and ‘Why summers really aren’t what they used to be’ (*Daily Post*, 18 September 2006: 17). Other stories refer to the loss of the nation’s coastline and beaches (*Evening Chronicle*, 20 December 2002: 5), the associated end of the “Bucket-and-spade” holiday (*Western Daily Press*, 22 Jul 2003: 3) and the loss of “coastal beauty spots” (*Bristol Evening Post*, 29 April 2005: 16). Although a little outside of the scope of this paper, it is perhaps worth acknowledging that this lament over the loss of the ‘traditional’ English landscape was not limited to the local and regional newspaper press. For example, in the *Daily Express* Richard Sadler noted that “Global warming will alter the appearance of rural Britain with its village cricket pitches and flower-decked parks all under threat” (9 September 2004: 24) and John Ingham that “[t]he thirsty oak – symbolic of Britain’s nautical heritage – could be replaced by other trees including silver maple, black cherry, sycamore, yew, and magnolia” (13 September 2006: 5). Though in some ways these stories appear as a disparate array of accounts, when considered together, they reveal the existence of a narrative that points, albeit implicitly, to the symbolic power of landscape as a marker of English national identity (on which see Matless 1990; Daniels 1993). In this sense, then, the stories that we have identified allude to the undermining of a distinct, though very rarely specified, English landscape; moreover, they are all tales of both invasion and of loss.

The death of the English garden

To finish our analysis, we turn to stories that focus on what might be regarded as one of the most intimate scales at which the impact of global climate change might be felt by people: the level of the garden. As Neve notes, “[w]hen a man has part of the world under his hand, to re-order it as something according to his own nature, it becomes like a painting or a poem... he makes of it his own world” (1990: 49. Cited in Brace 1999a: 365). Though a strangely gendered account, Neve

does capture the significance of gardens as spaces in which individuals seek to domesticate, order, and even tame nature. Moreover, he refers, albeit implicitly, to the important position that gardens hold in the national cultural imagination, coming as they do to represent a particular type of Englishness (Wiener 1992). This is of relevance here because, according to reports in both national and local and regional newspapers, this ‘traditional’ English garden, with its lupins, hollyhocks, and climbing roses, is also under threat from global climate change. In the spring of 2000, the *Evening Standard* reported on a meeting between the National Trust, the Royal Horticultural Society, and the Government’s UK Climate Impact Programme to examine this very question (Gruner 6 April 2000: 7). As the headline suggests, ‘Olives and dates in an English country garden, circa 2050’, the fear at this time was that the ‘traditional’ English country garden would be replaced by a Mediterranean hybrid. Indeed, a few years later a similar story appeared in the *Western Daily Press*, which noted that “experts are also warning the traditional English garden could soon be a thing of the past” (13 May 2002: 10).

The significance of the loss of this seemingly potent symbol of national cultural identity was, however, most apparent following the publication of a report entitled, ‘Gardening in the Global Greenhouse: The Impacts of Climate Change on Gardens in the UK’ (Bisgrove and Hadley 2002). In brief, the report, though providing an overview of the ‘big’ science of climate change, particularly as it was predicted to affect the UK, offered an assessment of the impact of this upon the nation’s garden(er)s. As the authors note, “[t]he increasing appreciation of gardens and the expanding catalogue of damage imposed on them by extreme weather events, combined with mounting scientific evidence of the existence and scale of climate change” has led to concerns that the “changing climate must inevitably have significant implications for the future of gardens” (Bisgrove and Hadley 2002: 14). It was the predicted demise of this particular feature of the national landscape that was the key focus in the newspaper media coverage: ‘End of the

English garden' (*Evening Standard*, 19 November 2002: 23), 'Global threat to English gardens' (*Daily Express*, 20 November 2002: 14), and 'Is it the end for the English country garden?' (*Daily Telegraph*, 20 November 2002: 7). A further point to note here is that much of the newspaper reporting drew heavily on a summary report, which provided both visual and textual representations of the "traditional English cottage garden". For example, its front cover was dominated by a 'chocolate box' image of a thatched cottage set within a flourishing garden and the text pointed to the key species associated with the "traditional herbaceous border" and highlighted the importance of the lawn, that "icon of British gardens" (Gates 2002: 13).

Though the report itself offers a much more complex picture than this, it was upon the loss of these key features to the English landscape that much of the reporting focused. This point can be illustrated further through reference to a story that appeared in the *Daily Mail*, which informed its readership that the "traditional British garden could soon become unrecognisable" (Chapman, 20 November 2002: 15). As it went on to state, gone were the "lush green lawns", "[r]ose beds and herbaceous borders", "[l]upins, rhododendrons and dwarf willow" and in their place we will find a "Mediterranean-style landscape of olive groves and palm trees." This image of a transformed landscape was reproduced across all of the newspapers that covered this story. Further, almost without exception, this transformation was not greeted with anticipation, this was not, as the authors of the report suggested, an opportunity to introduce "new and exciting species" to the English garden (Bisgrove and Hadley 2002: 69). However, we cannot only read the transformation narrative in the pejorative sense. There is also the suggestion, and it is only that, of a very different response to these changes in the English landscape. If we return to an article published in the *Yorkshire Post*, a careful reading of the story also reveals that the readership was informed that the Mediterranean-inspired garden will "*eventually become the new English garden*" (Patel, 13 September 2006. Emphasis added).

Though certainly not a dominant element of the discourse, it might be argued that this sense of ‘becoming’ is suggestive of a much more dynamic view of the relationship between landscape transformation and identity. Other illustrations of this particular interpretation included a story published in *The Journal*, which suggested that, although the ‘Gardening in the Global Greenhouse’ report stated that the “classic English country garden” would become “increasingly difficult and costly to maintain,” it also noted that there was an “upside for amateur gardeners” (20 November, 2002: 6). Moreover, another, more recent, story in the *Birmingham Post* was published under the headline ‘Axe may fall on the old, but new will not be far behind’ (29 May 2006: 6). What is important is that in these stories there is no sense of the purity of the national landscape being lost, or even defiled, as ‘native’ species disappear and ‘alien’ and/or ‘exotic’ ones arrive (Head and Muir 2006). Rather, there is simply an acceptance of the inevitability of the transformation that will take place as global climate change is more clearly marked out on the English landscape.

Discussion and conclusion

Clearly, a paper that focuses on newspaper stories such as the ones we have outlined above moves us beyond the public understanding of climate change as it is currently interpreted. Though the stories that we mention, and indeed the reports that they draw upon, were very much framed by current scientific knowledge regarding the predicted impacts of this global phenomena, the tale being narrated is a much broader one than this. This is not a tale of abstract threat or impending doom nor is there an obvious attempt to educate an unknowing public about international scientific debates on the topic. Rather, the narrative thread that is interwoven throughout the stories concerns both the ‘scale’ at which global climate change will be, or is

being, experienced and its impact on those features of the material and symbolic landscape that are key to notions of Englishness and national identity. It is upon the interpretation of these distinct threads that this discussion will focus. We begin with the notion of scale.

In this paper, scale might be conceived in a number of ways. Firstly, there is the scale at which the various newspapers operate and here a relatively clear, and overly simplistic, distinction is often made between the national and the local and regional newspaper press. However, as we have revealed, this does not mean that the latter ignore national and international debates, including those related to global climate change. Moreover, it is important that we recognise that this layer of the newspaper press is not a uniform entity either with regards to the public(s) that they serve or the quality of their journalism. For some, the national newspaper landscape in the UK is polarised between the ‘quality’ and ‘popular’ press, with the ‘mid-market’ tabloids sandwiched somewhere in-between (Sparks 1992). The relevance of this polarisation was demonstrated in a recent UK ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) report which revealed that the average length of newspaper articles relating to climate change published in the *Daily Mail* (470 words) compared favourably with those published in the *Daily Telegraph* (425 words) and the *Guardian* (592 words) (Hargreaves et al. 2003: 14). Moreover, as the authors of the report went on to state, one particular story, written by the *Daily Mail*’s science correspondent, James Chapman, was regarded as a “good example of how tabloid newspaper coverage doesn’t have to involve ‘dumbing down’” (2003: 21).

A similar argument could and we suggest, should, be made for the local and regional newspapers that are covered in this analysis. Though many of these newspapers adopt the same narrative journalistic style associated with the tabloid press – where the authoritative tone preferred by the broadsheets is replaced by a conversational and personalised one (Connell 1998) – there is

evidence that experts from institutions that are ‘local’ to the area covered by these newspapers are employed to either write about or comment upon important national and international debates and/or events. Further, the length of some of the articles that we have analysed is not too different from that found in the national newspaper press. In this sense, the notion of scale that is sometimes used to distinguish between newspapers appears more akin to what Smith (2003) refers to as an ‘intuitive fiction’ because the similarities between the reporting blur the level at which it is produced. However, ‘scale’ in the sense that it has been interpreted here, also refers to the ‘rescaling’ of global climate change discourse. Put differently, while none of the topics covered within the newspapers analysed can be regarded as being locally specific, they do serve to make seemingly global phenomena more locally relevant: that is, they are ‘domesticated’.

Another interesting and noteworthy aspect of our analysis of these regional newspaper stories, especially those that relate to the transformation of landscapes or to species loss or invasion, is the way in which they have been linked to ideas relating to national (and regional) identity. More specifically, there is clear evidence from the stories that we have analysed that the already happening or predicted impact of global climate change is presented as a threat to English (though often presented as British) identity. Here enduring ideas about the relationship between landscape and ‘Englishness’ are crucial. As scholars such as Daniels (1993) and Matless (2001) reveal, the idea of the traditional English landscape, and more importantly what does or does not belong within it, is an important element in the construction of national identity. In the stories that we have analysed, this is especially apparent in reports that cover changes to the archetypal English garden. In this sense, the loss of features such as the lawn, or specific species of flower and plant, as well as the encroachment of garden designs that have their origins in foreign climes, are not only presented as a loss to the English landscape but, by association, to the identity of its people.

Clearly, this association between landscape and identity is a little problematic. For one, Brace (1999a, 1999b) has argued quite successfully that there is a failure in this interpretation to recognise the role of the regional in the construction of national identity. This is important because the gardens and landscapes that are presented in national newspapers as being threatened by global climate change will, almost inevitably, be read by some individuals as a loss to regional, but not necessarily to national, identity. Further, the changes that global climate change might bring to the ‘English’ landscape are not seen by everyone in the pejorative sense. As we reveal, the introduction of, for example, a more Mediterranean climate, along with all the changes that this might bring, is, for some, part of the dynamism that is an inherent feature of any relationship between landscape and identity (see Tolia-Kelly 2006). Though this is undoubtedly the case, it remains important to recognise that the threat of landscape transformation and loss continue to be associated with ideas relating to English national, and as the Prince of Wales noted, “cultural” identity (Prince of Wales 2002). By framing climate change as a ‘threat’ to traditional symbols of ‘Britishness’ or ‘English identity’, and also significantly as a contributor to a more positive dynamic identity, the newspaper press play a very important, and hitherto largely neglected, role in shaping public engagements with climate change. They highlight the complex interplay between loss and nostalgia, and a more optimistic, future-orientated vision of identity that is also associated with global change. Just as broadsheet newspapers have been recognised for their important ‘agenda-setting’ function, the (re)presentation and cultural politics of climate change discourse in the UK’s local and regional press should be acknowledged and its impact more widely debated.

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