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Environmentality by the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change: Neoliberal ethos and the production of environmental subjects in Acre and Mozambique

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Abstract

As part of the transnational governance of the environment, platforms like the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) have created a regime that seeks to reinforce and reproduce the neoliberal ethos that informs current environmental conservation initiatives, as well as that seeks to produce environmental subjects. Such ethos is expressed through the preference for market-based solutions, principles of individual responsibility, or incentives to self-government. Drawing on ethnographic research in Acre (Brazil) and Mozambique, I explore some of the local elements of this neoliberal ethos. I use two public events about climate change to contend that such events constitute local instantiations of the UNFCCC's environmentality, by collectively performing and reproducing the neoliberal ethos that is encapsulated in the governance of the problem of climate change. These collective performances are important for the crystallization of a narrative that explains the reality and the terms of understanding future realities, thus contributing to processes of subjectification. The performances of these narratives are also important instances of mediation between the local and the transnational. I argue that although the production of environmental subjects promoted by the UNFCCC necessarily implies the erasure of localities, such subjectification depends on its indexation to local specificities. Ultimately, the reproduction of these environmental subjects—and the neoliberal ethos that undergirds their own constitution—has the potential to preclude the imagination of alternative models of development and of fighting climate change.

Keywords

Environmentality, neoliberal ethos, climate change, United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change, environmental subjects

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In 1992, when the Earth Summit took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, audiences beyond academia were already knowledgeable about climate change as a serious environmental problem. This summit was an important historical mark for two of its outcomes, which are necessarily interlinked. One was the constitution of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the institutional and legal arrangement henceforth responsible for addressing the problem of climate change. The second was the redefinition of "the environment" as an object of development intervention (Escobar, 1995) and of transnational governance—a redefinition enshrined in the concomitant creation of other transnational institutions to govern the environment. The creation of these institutions meant that the environment—notably the environment of poor countries—just like in any other development intervention, should henceforth be governed by the knowledge, skills, and resources held by experts from the Global North. Together, all these events contributed to the creation of an "environmentality" regime defined by new technologies of environmental governance, and the production of environmental subjectivities (Agrawal, 2005). Because there are distinct environmentalities (Fletcher, 2010: 177), the one that I am most concerned with here is tied to a transnational form of power (exercised by institutions like the UNFCCC) through the constitution of a legal apparatus and policy prescriptions to address the problem of climate change, and to the production of new environmental subjectivities due to the internalization of dominant discourses about climate change.

Thus, drawing on the ethnographic analysis of two events about climate change—one in Acre (Brazil), and another one in Maputo (Mozambique)—I will focus on how these environmental subjectivities are collectively performed and reproduced under these new transnational governance regimes. While these two public events provide an example of how transnational organizations seek to produce new forms of subjectivity by instilling a neoliberal ethos, they also demonstrate the tensions emerging from locality. That is, if this neoliberal ethos tends to ignore localities, it can only be meaningful constituted when indexing local specificities.

Although the concept of neoliberalism can be problematic due to the existence of multiple, and at times, contradictory definitions of its meaning (Brenner et al., 2010; Flew, 2014), here I am building upon the work developed by other scholars about neoliberal conservation, who contend that neoliberalism—despite its local nuances—can be generally characterized by privatization, marketization, commodification, decentralization, and handover of governance to non-state actors such as NGOs[1] (Castree, 2008; Fletcher, 2010; Fletcher and Büscher, 2017). I am also contending that this neoliberalism is a constituting element of a transnational governance that has gradually emerged since the 1990s (Rist, 1997: 212) and whose power operates simultaneously through and across national states, non-state actors (like NGOs), and international organizations (Neumann and Sending, 2010: 10).

Ethos is usually associated with the moral character of a people, and to a set of dispositions that informs people's behaviors.[2] Here, I am using ethos as a form of mediation between agents and structures, that is collectively produced, internalized and reproduced. This means that the components of neoliberalism—as characterized above—are collectively performed and individually internalized to the point that this neoliberal ethos becomes gradually embedded in people's perspectives and dispositions, that they come to think of the ethos as an inevitable and immutable part of the way people are "naturally" (LiPuma, 2017: 257). As such, this ethos comes to structure people's perspectives of the world and their actions within it. One important part of this collective performance is carried out by high-status individuals through a "retrospective narrative performativity," that not only enables the collective acceptance of the reality

explained by such narrative but, more importantly, crystallizes the conditions through which individuals come to understand future realities (LiPuma, 2017: 219). Thus, for example, if the high-status individuals from the events I describe here frame the problem of climate change within local events, and then go on to argue that the market-based solutions being applied on a global level are particularly apt to local conditions—because particular local circumstances provide these solutions with meaning—then such solutions begin to be perceived as the most legitimate and effective ones. Moreover, those solutions will be the ones that "naturally" come to mind in the future, in the face of similar problems.

While the public events I examine here were spaces where this neoliberal ethos was collectively performed, legitimizing state interventions on the environment, and informing many individual perspectives about climate change, I do not intend to claim, however, that such ethos has been totally assimilated. Nor do I contend that the Acreans and Mozambicans present at these events internalized uncritically the environmentality regime produced by transnational organizations—a conclusion that has been strongly criticized by others (Cepek, 2011; Cortes-Vazquez and Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2018; Jepson et al., 2012; Li, 2007). Instead, I aim to highlight the types of messages and discourses that are used across transnational levels to reinforce the UNFCCC's environmental governance while seeking to produce environmental subjects, and how these messages and discourses are locally resignified.

By comparing these two different sites, I demonstrate how the UNFCCC process of subjectivity is not a concluded project, but rather a continuous one (Rutherford, 2007), whose success depends on the anchoring of a specific discourse about climate change—repeated in similar forms in different contexts—in instances of locality.[3] As such, I argue that these public events constitute not only local performances of the transnationally defined neoliberal ethos, but also important spaces for the mediation between the local and the transnational. Such mediation occurs through the compounding of UNFCCC's discourses on climate change with local elements, henceforth promoting the enrollment of people to transnational climate change discourses. This incorporation of global discourses in local realities is operated through a "pragmatic performativity" whose main constituents are the repetition (of discourses and practices—especially by high-status individuals) and the indexicality of a specific (global) narrative to the (local) elements of that same narrative (LiPuma, 2017: 218).

I will start by a short description of the neoliberal ethos undergirding the UNFCCC's climate governance, followed by the ethnographic analysis of the public events about climate change that took place in August 2015 in Rio Branco (Acre), and in March 2016 in Maputo. Attendance to these events followed from extended fieldwork in both Acre and Mozambique focusing on the local implementation of REDD, a transnationally prescribed mechanism for forest conservation.[4]

The problem of climate change as the embodiment of a neoliberal ethos

The UNFCCC was created after very lengthy negotiations held prior to the Earth Summit, with the goal of stabilizing the concentration of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere to avoid the dangerous warming of the planet. Inherent to the UNFCCC's creation were the assumptions that climate change was caused by an excessive emission of GHG, that those gases were anthropogenic, and that industrialized countries were the most responsible for the current concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere.[5] For that reason, the first principle of the UNFCCC states the following: "The Parties should protect the climate system (...) on the

basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change'' (UNFCCC, 1992: 4). The way in which the UNFCCC defined the problem of climate change and advanced corresponding solutions to it expresses a neoliberal ethos which can be identified through three constitutive elements of the UNFCCC and the agreements it has fostered since its creation. One is the simplification of the problem of climate change followed by the assumption that markets are effective solutions to this problem. Both are interconnected because the implementation of market-based mechanisms hinges on such simplification. Finally, the other is the language used in the texts of the UNFCCC's agreements.

To simplify to commodify

Five years after the agreement to create the UNFCCC, the signatory Parties adopted the Kyoto Protocol, establishing a reduction of GHGs by 5.2 percent from 1990 levels for the developed nations overall; developing countries were allowed to increase their ''still relatively low'' emissions, so they could ''meet their social and development needs'' (UNFCCC, 1992: 1).[6] The Kyoto Protocol included the use of ''flexible mechanisms''—commonly referred to as ''carbon markets''—in order to help developed countries ''achieving compliance with their quantified emission limitation and reduction commitments'' (UNFCCC, 1998: 11). Through these markets, companies and entrepreneurs from industrialized countries implemented reducing emissions project in the Global South, as a form of helping poor countries ''achieving sustainable development'' through technology transfer,[7] while simultaneously reducing emissions in the global atmosphere.

The inclusion of carbon markets as an effective means to reduce emissions follows from a very simplified form of perceiving the problem of climate change—a simplification that occurs in three ways. First, through the idea that the environment can be understood as a simple relation between inputs and outputs, in which ''pollution [or GHGs emissions are] reconstructed as an externality driven by inadequate pricing, and where the market is the most efficient way of doing this'' (Lane, 2015: 46–47). Indeed, during the negotiations leading to Kyoto, some delegates[8] considered climate change to be a *market failure*, and GHG emissions as an *externality*, concluding that under a cost-benefit analysis, markets would be less costly and more effective than policy regulation in reducing emissions (Baron and Colombier, 2005: 153; O'Sullivan and Sheffrin, 2006: 195). Second, through the simplification of all GHGs into the fungible unit ''carbon dioxide equivalent'' (CO_2e) or simply carbon—a fungibility that was established independently of gases' different global warming potential (MacKenzie, 2009: 446) and of their diverse sources and social significance (Bumpus, 2011: 622; Demeritt, 2001: 316; Lohmann, 2008: 362). Accordingly, GHG emissions were fictitiously objectified (in a financial asset), standardized (in a fungible unit), and quantified in ways that allow for their scientific representation (in climate modeling)[9] and management (through emissions trading). Finally, through the idea that within a global atmosphere—a concept enabled by the Cold War techno-race (Masco, 2010)—the problem of climate change could be addressed in any part of the world, no matter the origin of emissions. Hence, following this simplification logic, protecting a forest from any country of the Global South can compensate for the polluting emissions of industrialized countries, with benefits for the global climate.[10]

Despite these assumptions, carbon markets have been riffed with problems that challenge claims about their effectiveness in fighting climate change,[11] demonstrating that neither have they supported the sustainable development of poor countries, nor promoted any significant

technology transfer (Lohmann, 2009). The emissions reductions that European countries can claim since Kyoto came into effect in 2005 are, instead, the result of industrial relocations to China and other poor countries (Pan et al., 2005). Yet, all policy interventions on these markets have been spurred by the imperative of saving them (Machaqueiro, 2017) because despite their ineffectiveness, they have important ''disciplining'' effects on environmental governance (Dempsey and Suarez, 2016) contributing to the ethos' maintenance.

Neoliberalizing language

If the simplification of the problem of climate change and the suggestion of carbon markets as the most efficient solution to it emerged in tandem within the UNFCCC's constitution, the language enshrined in its agreements is increasingly revealing of the neoliberal ethos that informs this transnational organization. By comparing the text of the Kyoto Protocol with the more recent, and much celebrated, Paris Accord, it is possible to see the evolution toward a more neoliberal framework, expressed in the terms associated with emissions reductions, with the inclusion of new actors in mitigating actions, and in perspectives about justice. Thus, while the Kyoto Protocol mentioned ''emission limitation'' and ''reduction commitments'' (UNFCCC, 1998), the Paris Agreement refers to ''nationally determined contributions'' (UNFCCC, 2015), thereby emphasizing the voluntary character of the accord. Indeed, although the Kyoto Protocol never established sanctions for non-compliant Parties, the commitments therein inscribed were legally binding. In the Paris text they are mere contributions.[12]

Another important difference in the language is the expansion of activities to reduce emissions beyond the scope of state-Parties. That is, the Paris Agreement notes the importance of engaging ''all levels of government and various actors'' (UNFCCC, 2015: 1), which includes local authorities, individuals, NGOs, and corporations. The inclusion of these different actors is important because it points to the neoliberal propensity to decentralize and hand over governance to non-state actors, and puts the issue of responsibility in a different light.

Moreover, the Kyoto Protocol stated that in achieving mitigation commitments, Parties would take ''into account their common but differentiated responsibilities and their specific national and regional development priorities, objectives and circumstances'' (UNFCCC, 1998: 9). Although vague, the statement ''common but differentiated responsibilities'' implied that developed countries were responsible for the current emissions' accumulation and for that reason, they should take the lead in the efforts to reduce it (Kutney, 2014: 155). Accordingly, the Kyoto Protocol accounted for the historical responsibility of industrialized countries and exempted poor countries from any mitigation commitments. The Paris Accord introduced a subtle change in this statement, and although it repeats the sentence ''common but differentiated responsibilities'' four times, changed its meaning: ''In pursuit of the objective of the Convention, and being guided by its principles, including the principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances...'' (UNFCCC, 2015: 1).

The differences are the introduction of a ''principle of equity'' and the replacement of ''development priorities'' for ''respective capabilities'' both of which reflect the new terms of understanding the problem of climate change. The Paris Accord epitomized this new understanding by eliding historical responsibilities and by orienting mitigation actions toward the future. The introduction of the principle of equity and the erasure of development priorities meant that developing countries were *equally* responsible for taking action, and that development levels were no longer relevant—just the *capacity* to act.

Concomitantly, individual agents and other than country-governments (like city authorities or state governors, and the private sector) are also welcome by the Agreement to engage in mitigation actions—the idea is that everybody can, and should, do their part.

The contention that poor countries—no matter how responsible for the cumulative level of GHGs in the atmosphere and despite their greater vulnerability in the face of extreme weather events—have to shoulder the mitigation efforts is now widely accepted and has been enshrined in the transnational governance of the climate. The mainstreaming of this idea is crucial to the production of environmental subjects, who are themselves, important in the reinforcement and reproduction of the UNFCCC's neoliberal ethos—by accepting and repeating such idea.

I will now turn to two local events about climate change to highlight how the UNFCCC's environmentality regime travels across transnational and local levels, and what kinds of subjectivities it seeks to produce. I start by a public hearing that occurred in Acre, a poor Amazonian state in the Northeastern part of Brazil, and then move to Mozambique, to another public event organized by the Mozambican government to divulge the results of the Paris Conference of the Parties. Both events underscore the dominance of "environmental narratives" about climate change on which UNFCCC's environmentality is grounded (Forsyth and Walker, 2008).

Acre: Reinforcing the state narrative

Rio Branco, August 2015. Inside Acre's State Assembly a public hearing about climate change and its impacts for Acre was about to take place. Although it was a public event, it had not been widely advertised, and I only learned about it because one of my interlocutors had brought it to my attention. As with any other event in Acre, and despite the fact that the room was already packed with students and public officials, the hearing started with a two-hour delay, after the important guests finally arrived at the Assembly. Among these were several state officials, including the Mayor of Rio Branco, the state senator and former governor, Jorge Viana, and the former minister of the Environment recently turned into environmental star, Marina Silva. Her arrival was particularly celebrated among the audience not just because of her international status, but also because she is an Acre native and her life-story is frequently associated with Chico Mendes.[13] Mendes was a rubber tapper who fought against forced evictions and the deforestation promoted by big land-owners who wanted to convert Acre's forests into ranching lands. He was murdered in 1988, and after that became an international "environmental hero" and part of Acre's state mythology. According to this mythology, Acre is a state with an identity shaped by its forests and, as such, has pioneered several environmental conservation policies, from the establishment of extractive reserves—the victorious outcome of Chico Mendes and other rubber tappers' fight (Almeida, 2002)—to the implementation of a law for payments for environmental services that includes a mechanism to reduce deforestation called REDD.

At the inaugural table there were many other personalities from the state whose names were not even in the official program, and around them a swarm of local reporters and photographers tried to get some words or the best angles for pictures. The inaugural ceremony turned very formal, especially when the state anthem was played and everybody got up, after which a chorus sang a cheesy song about the destruction of the environment. Through some of the performances that punctuated the whole event, I became aware that even though the public hearing was presented as an opportunity to disseminate general information about climate change and its repercussions for Acre, it served instead as a

ritual to reinforce an official narrative about the state and its policies. Simultaneously, this ritual was performing a transnational narrative about climate change that, by incorporating local elements (namely the mythology associated to Chico Mendes), was also contributing to the formation of subjectivities conforming to UNFCCC's ethos.

All the speakers were in some way connected to the state government or to public institutions involved in the governance of specific areas of the state, including the Institute for Climate Change (responsible for the implementation of the law on payments for environmental services), the local office of the federal agricultural research corporation (Embrapa), the representation of the indigenous agroforestry agents, and the state university (some of its researchers work as consultants for local authorities). Throughout all the talks, there were some common elements that are constitutive parts of the state narrative being reinforced. One of those elements was the legacy of Chico Mendes—claiming to either had personally met him or learned from his teachings, almost all speakers referred to the rubber tapper as the person who had taught the world that it is possible to develop sustainably, keeping the forest standing. This emphasis on Chico Mendes's legacy, even by people who never met him, nor have shared his socialist affiliations, served two goals within the official narrative. First, to claim some sort of pioneering in environmental policies by the state of Acre—indeed the word "pioneer" was several times mentioned by different speakers—and second, to legitimize state policies presented as "sustainable" or targeting "sustainable development."[14] For example, Jorge Viana, the state senator, referred to his past with Chico Mendes (he actually met him, even though he did not partake in the rubber tappers' struggles) to recall the fact that *Chico Mendes never wasted an opportunity to take you to the forest and show you its value*. It is significant, however, that if, for Chico Mendes, this "value" represented the possibility of rubber tappers' livelihoods in the forest, for the senator the "value" he was referring to was associated with state policies of expanding what is called "sustainable forest management" into protected areas, and to the new law on access to biodiversity. That is, the legacy of Chico Mendes was resignified as a means to legitimize policies that translate "value" into price, through market-based mechanisms such as payments for environmental services. Put simply, according to the speakers the implementation of such policies to tackle climate change made sense locally, because Chico Mendes would have approved them.

Three of the speakers (from the university, the Institute for Climate Change, and Embrapa) stressed that climate change is real and a serious threat to Acre, given its vulnerability to extreme droughts and violent floods. The talks of these speakers were especially remarkable to the extent that it seemed they were addressing an audience of non-believers in climate change, which was not the case.[15] By associating these climate change discourses with current policies implemented by state authorities—specifically in what concerned housing and relocation of populations, rural zoning and property registration, and the enforcement of measures to achieve zero deforestation—these speakers were not just justifying such policies but also making them seem as inevitable. This was especially the case with the relocation of riverine populations into a "new city," far away from the center and that has been very contested by those forcefully removed. Moreover, by positing climate change as a "crisis," these speakers added a particular urgency to those policies. The idea of crisis (and of the inherent urgency associated with it) was part of many of the presentations.

In her long talk, at the end of the event, Marina Silva insisted on the idea that humankind is facing a crisis that encloses in itself a multitude of other crises: political, economic, environmental, and humanitarian. However, while this type of crisis discourse grounds critiques of capitalism, of markets, or of politics—as she indeed did—it does not foster

"alternative narratives," reproducing instead "extant hierarchies" (Roitman, 2013: 90). In other words, even though her discourse criticized capitalist rationale of markets and over-consumption, and policies that hurt the environment, she never challenged the neoliberal logic and hierarchies that created the "crisis" in the first place. This tension between a seeming critique of neoliberalism and a conformity toward the models built by that same neoliberalism did not go unnoticed among the audience, with some people using the Q&A period to accuse state authorities of chasing small landowners in the enforcement of deforestation laws, while large landowners and known environmental offenders are not bothered. Disgruntled members of the audience drew attention to the reproduction of a longstanding history of leniency toward the rich, but despite their assertiveness, their questions were deflected or simply dismissed.

There was another important element of the official narrative of the state that was reinforced during this event. As an Amazonian state, Acre is inhabited by many different indigenous groups. For the most part, these groups have their lands demarcated by the federal government and there are no major conflicts over land opposing Indians with other groups.[16] State discourses on indigenous people are usually romanticized, in the sense that all conflicts are portrayed as being past events, that Indians' demands have been met by current policies, and that indigenous people sustain a balanced and sustainable relationship with nature. This discourse was reproduced during the hearing by the representative of the indigenous agroforestry agents.[17] Instead of talking about the crucial role these agents play in the prevention of wild fires, or about the indigenous demands that these agents are officially recognized with formal work contracts, this representative—an indigenous person herself—reinforced the assumption that Indians have a closer relationship with forests. Reiterating the idea that Indians have been properly managing their resources for many years—unlike white people—she stressed the fact that Indians nonetheless need to create and implement "management plans" for their lands because while indigenous populations increase, their territories do not. Her talk reproduced the stereotype of the "ecological Indian" (Krech III, 1999), while availing state (and federal) policies toward the Indians.[18] Simultaneously, her intervention valued a modernist model of territorial legibility (Scott, 1998)—epitomized in the "management plans" Indians have been creating—and applied a Malthusian framework to indigenous groups and their territories. Malthus and his pessimistic forecasts were indeed a common trope in almost all presentations, although without a clear connection to Acre's demography.

Individual responsibility in a shared planet

Malthusian theories have great currency among environmentalists to explain conflicts over natural resources (see Neumann, 1998: 8), or even conventional wars (cf. Richards, 1996). Within the UNFCCC, Malthus is equally popular not just to explain supposedly increasing levels of deforestation in the Global South (see Leach and Fairhead, 2000), but also to substantiate scenarios of increasing carbon emissions leading to irreversible warming temperatures. The idea that there are "natural limits" to humans' needs remains an unchallenged axiom (Harvey, 1996: 146) within the UNFCCC and other transnational platforms. And while this axiom obscures the fact that those natural limits "are a social relation within nature (including human society) rather than some externally imposed necessity" (Harvey, 1996: 147), it also authorizes the UNFCCC's negotiation architecture. That is, it legitimizes the idea that because of climate change, poor countries will have to "develop sustainably" following low-carbon paths, because the planet cannot bear the carbon emissions that their development would entail. At the same time, industrialized

countries are not forced to take effectual actions to reduce their own emissions (because they can resort to carbon markets), nor are they effectively supporting alternative forms of development for poor countries. All the while, the historical responsibilities for climate change or the distribution rate of emissions' sources and consumptions are set aside from the discussions, which means that the structural inequalities that have produced the problem of climate change and defined the ways through which it is being addressed are never up for discussion.[19] The idea of planet's natural limits to carry poor countries' development seems so logical that it is constantly repeated and reinforced even by those who are most affected by its axiomatic acceptance. Malthus's popularity among these local discourses is thus expressed through the uncritical acceptance that due to the existence of limited resources, not everybody will have access to them—especially when such access means demarcating more lands to indigenous communities, or allowing small farmers to maintain traditional forms of swidden agriculture.

The axiom of Malthusianism is more effective—in terms of being uncritically repeated and reinforced by those most affected by its implications—when followed by two other premises that unsurprisingly, were repeated by almost all the speakers throughout the event. One was the idea of a *shared planet*, and the other, that of *individual responsibility*. The notion of a shared planet was expressed in various metaphors, from a *house* where we all live and that does not expand despite of the increase on the number of its inhabitants, to a *boat* that we all try to sail successfully together. These ideas are important because they epitomize a form of environmental subjectivity that the Paris Accord has substantiated through the elision of industrialized countries' historical responsibilities (therefore eliminating any sense of fairness or justice), and the inclusion of parties other than countries. Senator Jorge Viana stressed that idea when, at a certain point in his speech, he stated that *Brazil can do a lot in the fight against climate change*, that *Brazil does not have to wait for anybody*. This "wait" is a subtle reference to the demands by developing countries of having industrialized countries commit to significant reductions before they too partake in that effort, and of getting new and additional funds for adaptation and for their low-carbon development before they have to commit to an equivalent amount of mitigation—two demands that have marked the history of the UNFCCC negotiations. The Paris agreement not only eliminated that "wait" by having developing countries contribute with mitigation efforts (without concrete funds made available) but was also successful in having these same countries proudly announce their engagement in actions to reduce emissions. In this sense, the issue of justice encapsulated in the idea of historical responsibilities seems to have been reversed into a form of affirmative agency. In other words, *since they do not do anything, we will take matters into our own hands*.

The idea of *taking matters into our own hands* is especially reasoning at the individual level (Maniates, 2001), hence the increasing popularity of forms of "ethical consumption" (Carrier, 2010), such as the use of websites to offset individuals' "carbon footprints," the consumption of low-carbon goods, or the attendance to "carbon-neutral" events. The senator's statement that *Brazil does not have to wait for anybody* alludes to individual action—*you do not have to wait for anybody* (meaning, your government) *to take action*. Indeed, this was mentioned several times too during the event, making climate change a problem that ought to be solved by everybody's individual actions. While it is arguably the case that each one of us should critically examine and change our behaviors regarding consumption, savings and recycling, attributing the problem of climate change to individuals removes the responsibility from governments and corporations by depoliticizing citizen's actions while dissolving that responsibility within an abstract mass of unknown individuals (Maniates, 2001). In the end, because everyone is responsible, no one is really accountable.

Mozambique takes on its responsibility

Maputo, August 2016. Around 300 people gathered in the conference room of a four-star hotel in the center of the city, excitedly expecting the arrival of the Minister of the Environment. All those sitting in the front row were asked to move to the back, since those front chairs were reserved for "special guests." After a moment of awkward silence, the minister was finally announced and everybody stood up, only sitting back down after the minister himself took his place. The event had been organized by the Ministry and by the Mozambique's office of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) with the goal of disseminating the results of the recent Paris Conference of the Parties. However, it had not been publicized in the local media. Therefore, the audience was composed of students of one of the speakers, and people already connected through their professional networks—which included me, as a researcher of environmental policies.[20] Aside from the Minister, the event included a member of the Mozambican delegation to the UNFCCC—who provided a very detailed description of the negotiations and the outcomes of the Paris meeting—an officer from the Ministry of Finances and Economy, a Professor from the University Eduardo Mondlane, a member of the local business organization, an officer from UNDP, and a representative of a coalition of local NGOs. The affiliation of the guests seemed to reflect the spirit of the Paris Agreement by bringing together governments, development agencies, business and private sector, and the so-called civil society.

The opening statement by the Minister was short but significant. Recognizing that the Paris Accord was not the agreement that they were hoping for—due to its lack of ambition—but the agreement that was possible, the Minister emphasized that Mozambique has to take responsibility in reducing emissions. This responsibility should not be a problem because taking care of natural resources is part of Mozambique's culture, he stated. As such, the reform of the forestry sector that the government is carrying out is Mozambique's greatest contribution to mitigation, he concluded. This reform—whose contours were not described by the Minister or by any other person during the event—includes some legal changes (regarding logging concessions), the implementation of REDD,[21] and incentives to industrial tree plantations for a pulp and paper company. Despite the local controversies regarding these plantations[22]—for involving non-native species like eucalyptus, and for the possibility of endangering local populations' food security—they are deemed positive forms of mitigating climate change.

The UNDP officer followed suit, reinforcing the message of responsibility brought by the Minister. Indeed, besides underscoring the need for all countries—including Mozambique—to take responsibility for climate change, this officer reproduced another key point of the Paris Accord by stating that the commitments between institutions, the private sector and civil society need to be reaffirmed on a daily basis. In this context, the "sustainable development" agenda is increasingly connected to the climate agenda, she stated, since one cannot be achieved without the other. For the representative of industries and corporations, the Paris Accord was a positive outcome for providing long-term certainty on the policy side, and for engaging the private sector in the mitigation efforts. Agreeing with the connection previously established between "sustainable development" and climate goals, this representative asked for more incentives for renewable energies, low-interest bank loans for low-carbon investments, and more predictability regarding future carbon prices.

The enthusiasm with which the private sector approached its inclusion in the Paris Accord is puzzling considering that reducing emissions implies additional costs to shift technologies and sources of energy. Yet, the policies so far adopted by the UNFCCC turned out to

transform climate change into a business opportunity that has been taken seriously by many corporations across the world,[23] thereby explaining their enthusiasm in seeing their role officially inscribed in the Paris Agreement. The participation of the private sector in solving climate change is tantamount to the neoliberal rationale that substantiated the emergence of payments for environmental services: that is, the assumption that the logics and mechanisms that created climate change can be harnessed to solve it (Fletcher and Büscher, 2017: 229). These first interventions were thus a clear reassertion of the UNFCCC's neoliberal ethos epitomized in the Paris Accord: orientation toward the future, with no regard for historical responsibilities; pursuit of "sustainable development" (as defined by developed countries and according to the resources and conditions made available by them); and involvement of the private sector (namely through a market-logic).

Despite the seeming harmony between speakers and the audience, the next speaker disrupted the atmosphere of conformity by harshly criticizing the Paris Accord. The representative for the local NGOs' coalition accused the agreement of being insufficient to contain the increase in temperatures, and for being vague in terms of actions and funds available. According to him, the only concrete solutions supported by the accord are market mechanisms like REDD. What is more, the rules to access the US$100 million (available since 2010) are so complicated that nobody has so far benefited from it, or really knows how to get it. He stated that the agreement does not provide appropriate support either for those already suffering from the impacts of climate change. Moreover, he argued, it was unfair for Mozambique to take such a significant mitigation goal when the responsibilities of the country were much different from those of rich countries, who continue to evade them by merely suggesting mitigation contributions—but what happens when in five years we realize that these countries did not comply? Who is going to take the responsibility for that?—he asked. He also denounced the fact that measures and money were being transferred to forests and to the rural sector instead of addressing the extractive industries, the real culprits of the problem. We need a different model of development, he concluded.

The critiques of the NGOs representative were not supported by anybody else in the room. Instead, the debate period was marked by some remarks by the audience who reflected a form of environmental subjectivity that conformed to the model put forward by the UNFCCC and other transnational organizations. One student from the university, for example, reversed the Kyoto principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" to argue that Mozambique is not a "victim" either. To her, the idea of responsibility was a form of empowerment rather than of justice. Accordingly, she defied the rest of the audience to take responsibility, and stop using charcoal to cook—a habit she justified with the better taste of chicken cooked like that. Although seemingly unimportant, this comment on the use of charcoal makes worthwhile a small detour away from this event.

Environmental narratives and self-government

Charcoal production is considered, by the World Bank, as one of the main drivers of deforestation—along with shifting agriculture—even though there is no direct connection between collecting wood for charcoal production and deforestation (Drigo et al., 2008). These considerations about deforestation drivers have been stated in the context of Mozambique's REDD program, implemented by national authorities under the rules and directives of the World Bank.

It is known that the widespread use of charcoal, even in urban areas like Maputo, is not due to particular gastronomical tastes or traditions, but to its price. Shifting to gas stoves not only implies a high upfront investment in the stove, but also forces people to buy expensive

gas bottles. Therefore, even though charcoal is a pricier option in the long-run, people can afford it because they can buy small amounts each time they need it. The recently approved Mozambican *National REDD + Strategy* recognizes this situation. As such, it includes the goal of providing more efficient methods of charcoal production and consumption (through efficient cook-stoves), and the industrial plantation of eucalyptus to provide feedstock for charcoal production as one measure to reduce deforestation in the country (Moçambique, 2016: 24–25). This document is an essential step in the REDD "readiness" process through which Mozambique can access World Bank funds, and has been prepared by external consultants working closely with Bank officers. Prior to the approval of this document, there was another *REDD + National Strategy* that was being drafted by Mozambican scholars, and that had a different perspective on charcoal. That document suggested preventing the conversion of forested areas for charcoal production by distributing low-consumption electric stoves, producing smaller gas bottles, and distributing domestic coal production (Moçambique, n/d). This draft proposal was abandoned because it did not follow the World Bank and the UNFCCC's template.[24] Furthermore, while *predatory wood collection* as a driver of deforestation and *efficient charcoal production and consumption* as its solution fit dominant discourses on climate change, high gas prices and distribution of gas stoves and of smaller bottles do not. Similarly, while choosing charcoal over gas (due to cultural gastronomic habits) fits those dominant discourses, structural conditions of poverty as constraints to behavior do not.

Although the defiance of the student on the use of charcoal was criticized by other members of the audience, the substance of her comment—that Mozambicans choose to pollute—was not exactly challenged, which could be interpreted as the expression of (at least partially) a successful internalization of the environmental subjectivity produced by the UNFCCC (and, in this case, by the World Bank). This form of environmentality implicitly expresses the idea that polluting is a matter of individual choice and that poor countries have the same development options rich countries do, and therefore, if their emissions are too high it is because they chose the wrong development path. Accordingly, and put simply, if Mozambicans were "good" environmental subjects, they would simply choose gas over charcoal, because that is a choice they can (and should) make. Other participants compounded this form of subjectivity by refusing to continue *to wait* for industrialized countries to take the lead on mitigation, and for their financial help. A person from the transnational environmental NGO World Wildlife Fund appealed for the need to take on mitigation actions without waiting any further for developed countries to do so. Specifically, he was referring to the importance of continuing to implement REDD, and expanding the cooperation with the private sector (namely concerning other forms of payments for environmental services).

Another defiant university student took the idea of *not waiting* even further, challenging everybody to individually contribute on a monthly basis for a national fund to deal with the extreme weather events that affect Mozambique periodically. Instead of waiting for those $100 million, he suggested, the country should create its own climate fund. His argument pointed to an ideal of autonomy and self-governance that was quickly picked up by the officer from the economy and finance ministry, who added that, as such, Mozambique would not have to wait for the United Nations to provide relief money every time a tragedy occurs. The ideal of self-governance along with decentralization is part of democratization efforts promoted by neoliberal reforms (West, 2008) and it certainly is not strange to the governance regime put forward by the UNFCCC. But in the same way that self-governance—as promoted by neoliberal reforms in rural Mozambique—"provided cover for dominant political actors to forego the responsibilities of authority and to feed themselves at

the expense of others'' (West, 2008: 118), so too does this national climate fund have the potential to offer developed countries an opportunity to evade their responsibilities for climate change and for its impacts on vulnerable states like Mozambique. The only difference is the scale of responsibilities and their avoidance.

At the end of the Q&A period, another government officer reinforced the narrative that had been performed throughout the event by repeating its key points. Emphasizing the importance of engaging everybody in the accord's implementation, she reiterated Mozambique's culture of taking care of nature, noting that the country would, therefore, take on its own mitigation responsibilities by addressing ''unsustainable'' practices of charcoal production and shifting agriculture. Ultimately, the acceptance to constitute a national climate fund—without continuing to *wait* for donor funds—evinced the principles of autonomy and self-government that transnational institutions have been seeking to infuse among Mozambicans since the 1990s' neoliberalization (see Pitcher, 2002).

Conclusion: Imagining other environmentalities?

The UNFCCC has been the transnational organization with the greatest visibility in environmental governance, due to the fact that climate change has been considered as the most profound threat humanity has ever faced (Klein, 2014). Although established as a negotiation platform, the UNFCCC has in fact shaped policy-making across many different states, and, as such, has contributed to the emergence and reproduction of an environmentality regime that has penetrated the legal and policy apparatus of countries—thus ensuring UNFCCC's self-reproduction. This regime has not only put forward new technologies of environmental governance (including forms of decentralization, self-government, and market-based mechanisms), but more importantly, it has promoted environmental subjectivities—all of which informed by a neoliberal ethos. The recent Paris Accord reinforced this ethos by positing climate change as an opportunity for the increased engagement of the private sector, and by replacing historical responsibilities with an orientation toward the future, with a special emphasis on individual responsibilities.

The two events I described here, although occurring in very different places, express the elements of this neoliberal ethos in similar ways, through the policies they have adopted in recent years. Both Acre and Mozambique have been implementing REDD in their territories, as well as other environmental policies oriented toward a market logic and engaging the private sector. All of these are supported by foreign funds[25] and work within the context of the UNFCCC's prescriptions to fight climate change. In both events the historical responsibility for the problem of climate change has been elided and reversed into a form of empowering agency in which these poor territories take matters into their own hands and do not wait for wealthier countries to do what they have been expected to do: effectively reduce emissions and provide financial assistance for those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Equally important in the deployment of this form of agency are ideas about a shared planet, in which we all have stakes and responsibilities, and in which individual actions can be as effective as regulatory policy—ideas mentioned in both events. In this context, the orientation toward the future—a premise of the Paris Accord—has been mostly subscribed by the people I describe here. This orientation toward the future not only forecloses the issue of historical responsibilities, but also obscures the structural inequalities that have caused climate change and other environmental problems in the first place. It conceals as well how those same structural inequalities shape the climate change negotiations' architecture, maintaining the power imbalances between the so-called developed and developing countries.

These events show how the establishment of the authorized terms and modes of discussing climate change is an important element of producing environmental subjectivities. For instance, in Rio Branco, disruptive questions regarding the lack of public policies to address infrastructural problems—like the ones caused by floods—were deflected (or simply ignored) by presenting climate change as an extreme exceptionality, whereas basic sanitation was described by authorities as part of the state measures to "adapt" to climate change. In the same way, in the Maputo event—where challenging questions were far less than in Acre—speakers insisted on the country's autonomy to face climate change and on the need to establish partnerships with the private sector, continuing the forest reform and capturing foreign aid.

Another instance of subjectivity production was the numerous manifestations of what can be considered denials of locality (always followed by the anchoring of local elements in a global narrative). One was the way in which the role of indigenous communities in Acre was portrayed—by a local indigenous woman—which followed the stereotype of the "ecological Indian" enshrined in the *Brundtland Report*, constantly reproduced by the environmentalist community—and, at times, by Indians themselves. The repetition of this stereotype sets aside from the discussion the problems that indigenous peoples face in different contexts, and the diverse ways in which they perceive the problem of climate change in their territories. Additionally, it compounds a greater narrative in which all indigenous peoples, no matter who, and where they are, are naturally prone to protect the environment.

Another instance of denial of locality can be perceived in the comments made about the use of charcoal in Mozambique, as if Mozambicans merely choose to continue to pollute and contribute to deforestation instead of using more efficient forms of energy. Those comments reproduce a dominant "environmental narrative" (widely popular among environmental NGOs and organizations such as the UNFCCC, FAO, or the World Bank) in which activities conducted by poor communities (like charcoal use and production, or shifting agriculture) are the main culprits of deforestation and therefore, of climate change. Both Acrean and Mozambican authorities have successfully incorporated this narrative in their discourses and policies toward small farmers and charcoal producers.

These two ethnographic moments also demonstrate how these meetings are productive for both the transnational governance of the environment, and for local governance, by mediating the tensions emerging out of locality. If one of the main goals of the events in Acre and in Maputo was to reinforce the neoliberal ethos undergirding the UNFCCC's governance of the problem of climate change, this reinforcement could not be done without indexing such ethos to local specificities—in the case of Acre, that of pioneering environmental conservation through a legacy of forest conservation led by Chico Mendes and other rubber tappers; and in the case of Mozambique, that of having environmental conservation inscribed in the country's culture—as expressed by the Minister. These meetings and the transnational governance they promote are therefore used by local authorities to legitimize what could be (and at times are) contentious policies. As such, policies become urgent and inevitable—in face of a crisis like climate change—and others, not directly connected to climate change, are associated with it because everything related to climate change immediately acquires more importance.[26] It is under the legitimizing discourse of urgent action against climate change that, for example, riverine populations in Rio Branco are being relocated (against their will) to a new area outside the city, and massive plantations of eucalyptus are taking place in Zambézia, risking the food security of local populations in Mozambique.

Ultimately, and more broadly, the performances of high-status individuals in both events illustrate how a transnational neoliberal ethos is framed around local narratives about the climate change. As the problem of climate change has been utterly simplified to the extent

that carbon markets are deemed crucial mitigation instruments, countries in the Global South have accepted to become the playground of those emissions reductions, by implementing market-based mechanisms such as REDD, or by agreeing to massive monoculture plantations—either because such market-based policy options match a local narrative of environmental conservation pioneering or because they fulfill local goals of political autonomy and self-government. All the while the Global North continues polluting.

Dominant discourses about climate change have gradually obscured inequalities between different parts of the world—not just in terms of responsibilities, but more importantly, how some parts of the world can be more vulnerable and affected than others—while simultaneously hindering questions about the economic and development models that created the problem of climate change in the first place. In these two events, the Mozambican NGOs representative was the only person who actually questioned the Paris Accord and the UNFCCC's governance of the problem of climate change. Yet, he was left talking alone, without anybody engaging with his critiques or dramatic appeal to change current economic models. Perhaps his loneliness can be seen as an unfortunate augury that the embodiment of the neoliberal ethos might have already precluded the possibility of imagining alternative models of development and of fighting climate change.

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Notes

1. Neoliberalism must be also understood as a dynamic concept that adapts to different situations, incorporating new characteristics. The changes in the UNFCCC language that I analyze here provide evidence of this dynamism.
2. Gregory Bateson used the concept of "ethos" to refer to a "feel" of a culture, although recognizing that such a word was an abstraction. He also considered it to be a "useful conceptual tool" that eased the relationship between his own mind and the data he had collected (1972: 107–108).

3. Although the scope of this article does not allow me to expand on this, my fieldwork demonstrated that this subjectivity process is not unidirectional either, as local perspectives on how to address climate change have also been incorporated by transnational organizations. For instance, in Mozambique forest conservation has locally been translated into ''rural development'' fulfilling both local needs and the Bank's plans of expanding into the rural sector.
4. The acronym REDD means reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. It is a climate change mitigation mechanism, conceived as a market, according to which the maintenance of forests in the Global South should be monetarily rewarded because forests act as carbon sinks, thus offsetting carbon emissions. Usually, this acronym is followed by the sign ''+'' which means the enhancement of carbon sinks. For simplification purposes, I only use the acronym REDD.
5. The idea that GHGs are responsible for climate change has a genealogy connected to the Cold War and the technoscientific developments that the nuclear and space races propelled regarding the planet's physical and biological systems, the oceans' currents, and satellite imagery (Fleming, 1998: 130; Orlove et al., 2015: 60–61). The Cold War and the widespread fears of a nuclear conflict were equally responsible for mainstreaming the perspective of the planet as ''an integrated biosphere'' in which environmental hazards (like nuclear contamination) could have global effects, that those effects could be both cumulative and transnational, and that international interventions could tackle such effects (Masco, 2010). The problem of climate change was defined following this rationale: it is a global problem; caused by a dangerous accumulation of anthropogenic GHGs (which are measurable, quantifiable, and predictable); and because of its anthropogenic origin, can equally be solved by man's intervention.
6. Although the terminology ''developed'' and ''developing'' countries is problematic due to its inherent assumptions, I will use it throughout the text to facilitate the reading. Alternatively, I will also refer to the former as ''rich,'' ''industrialized'' or ''countries from the Global North,'' and to the latter, ''poor'' and ''countries from the Global South'' although none of these terms are unproblematic on their own.
7. One of the ideas behind the creation of the Clean Development Mechanism was precisely the promotion of technology transfer; by implementing emissions reducing projects in poor countries, entrepreneurs would be bringing to those countries new and modern technologies helping them to ''develop.''
8. U.S. delegates were the most adamant defending market-based instruments to reduce emissions, but were heavily supported by Canada, Japan, Australia, Norway, and New Zealand. European countries were more sceptical but eventually also became enthusiasts of carbon markets (Yamin, 2005: 4–8).
9. The development of climate modeling rendered the problem of climate change legible (Scott, 1998)—through the translation of very complex data into maps, graphics, and tables—but more importantly, it made climate change objective and quantifiable to the point of enabling its scientific prediction and eventually, rational control (Demeritt, 2001: 312), specifically through geoengineering (Kwa, 2001: 135).
10. The logic is that forests, acting as a carbon sink, can compensate for GHG emissions.
11. Among these problems were numerous VAT frauds (Inman and Webb, 2011), excessive allocation of emission allowances (Elsworth et al., 2011), and corruption in the development of projects in China (Carrington, 2010).
12. This difference could also be interpreted, as pointed out by Fletcher and Büscher in their analysis of Foucault's distinction between organizing and regulatory, as yet another manifestation of neoliberalism: the Paris contributions are the outcome of less regulation (no more legally binding commitments) and more organization (as a means to expand the scope of carbon markets) (2017: 228).
13. Like Chico Mendes, Marina Silva was born very poor in a family of rubber tappers.
14. The concept of ''sustainable development'' was defined by the Brundtland Commission in its 1987 report, *Our Common Future*, and championed as the way to address environmental threats such as climate change. Despite being extremely vague, or precisely because of this vagueness (Harvey,

1996; Rist, 1997), the concept acquired great currency among development practitioners and expanded into the world of capital. "Sustainable development" became not only part of the development and policy-making jargon, but also gave increased legitimacy to practices that have been responsible for environmental degradation by providing them with epithets of "sustainability" or, in equivalent though subsequent versions, of embodying environmental paradigms like "green economy" (Esty and Winston, 2006; Richardson, 2013), or "green capitalism" (Berghoff and Rome, 2017). In short, "sustainability" became an economic project of reinforcing the prevailing capitalist order (Luke, 2005: 267).

15. Although many people in the audience took the Q&A period as an opportunity to confront local authorities with difficult questions about state policies, climate change and its impacts in the state were never questioned or even brought into the debate.
16. This situation changed dramatically since then. The governments that followed President Rousseff's ousting have consistently destroyed environmental protections and indigenous rights to the benefit of mining, oil, and industrial agriculture.
17. These agents are indigenous people who, after training by an indigenous organization, work to prevent forest fires. Their salaries and training have been financed by German funds to support REDD's implementation.
18. The demarcation of lands for indigenous peoples is decided at the federal level and not by state governments.
19. Within the negotiations, emissions are only accounted for from the perspective of their sources, that is, which countries emit more or less. However, if emissions were accounted for from the consumption perspective, the scenarios would change dramatically. For instance, although China is currently the world largest emitter, if emissions were counted from the consumption side, the U.S. and European countries would quickly replace China's position.
20. Although I cannot explore the issue here, the fact that these events are mostly advertised through "whatsapp" and "facebook" groups instead of more formal media—both in Acre and Mozambique—is significant in the examination of the implications for policy-making processes. Specifically, questions regarding how these groups are formed, who is included and excluded, and how they operate must have concrete consequences in policy making and implementation.
21. Mozambique started its REDD process by applying to the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility in 2008. Within that process, the country approved in 2013 a law enabling the development of private REDD projects but since then, changed its approach by implementing a state-led wider program involving two provinces.
22. Local NGOs have denounced some of these plantations for forcibly evicting populations from their lands. Simultaneously, there have been some incidents during which plantations were burned down by locals due to unfulfilled promises of jobs and other benefits to the population.
23. These policies include state subsidies for renewable energies and for low-carbon technologies, as well as ad-hoc measures to sustain carbon markets. I am not making an argument against state subsidies for technologies that are deemed more beneficial. The problem is that many of these subsidies have been used improperly for lack of overview, and have not been followed by policies of command and control forcing industries to actually reduce their levels of pollution.
24. Throughout my fieldwork, I have analyzed several documents related to deforestation, REDD, and the forest sector in general, realizing that institutions such as the World Bank, FAO, UNDP, and UNFCCC tend to produce generic and vague documents that elide localities and can, therefore, be applied to many different contexts. This preference for decontextualized information is the reason why the old REDD + Strategy was abandoned and remade following the generic World Bank template.
25. In the case of Acre, Germany, Norway, and the UK are the main donors; in Mozambique, most funds come from the World Bank.
26. In relation to this, it is worthwhile to mention a conversation I had with an environmental consultant in Mozambique, during which he complained about a document about the construction of a road that had to be "climate change resilient." In his words: "I don't know

what this means. I only know two types of roads: those that are well built and those that are not." Fieldnotes, 5 April 2016.

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