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Myths and images in global climate governance, conceptualization and the case of Brazil (1989 - 2019)

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Abstract

Countries have a self-image of their role in global climate governance. If that image does not correspond to the country's actual level of climate power, commitment and leadership, it becomes a myth. In this article, we define climate self-images/myths and analyze comprehensively the Brazilian case between 1989 and 2019. For most of this period, Brazil's self-image was a myth.

Keywords: Global Environmental Governance; Brazilian Foreign Policy; International Political Economy of Climate Change

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Introduction

During the second half of the 2000s, the Brazilian government consolidated an official narrative of the country as a major reformist power in the governance of climate change. This self-image had three central dimensions: Brazil as a major agent in the global carbon cycle; a key player in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations, and a developing country that far exceeded its obligations to contribute to stabilizing global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, thus becoming a role model in terms of mitigation actions. This image had emerged in 1992 at the Rio Conference, and in 1996-97 during the negotiations of the Kyoto Protocol (KP).

By the end of the 2000's, President Lula da Silva was telling the "American and European friends" that "in Brazil we talk less and do more" (Munari 2009), when announcing the country's mitigation commitment for the UNFCCC's Copenhagen COP. In 2015, President Dilma Rousseff's envoy to the COP in Paris

declared that Brazil already was a low-carbon economy, – a highly debatable statement that was incorporated into the Brazilian Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) (Brazil, Ministério do Meio Ambiente 2015). Although this climate self-image was built on some real improvements – such as the success of deforestation control in the Amazon between 2005 and 2012 and some developments in climate policy in the late 2000s – it ignored significant contradicting facts, such as the extremely irrational path of Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) emissions between 1990 and 2004; the Amazon deforestation resurgence since 2012; Brazil's conservative position in the UNFCCC negotiations; the increase in the share of fossil fuels in the energy matrix, and the path of domestic economic policy, which in every possible way conflicted with a low-carbon transition. Consequently, the self-image was nothing more than a myth.

In this article, we describe and analyze the mythical self-image that Brazil has created in three decades of the climate regime, with special focus on the period between 2006 and 2018, when Brazil was able to control deforestation and changed the path of climate commitment, further fueling the major reformist power myth. In order to do that, we first define what climate self-images and myths are.

The article is structured according to the following parts: in the first section, we conceptualize climate self-images and myths. In the second, we present the Brazilian climate myth, for which we identify three periods: Brazil as a major moderate climate power and leader of the developing world (1989-2005); Brazil as a major reformist power and global leader (2006-2018), and; the end of the climate myth under the Presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, beginning in 2019. We focus on the second period, in which the Brazilian myth was stronger and widespread. In the third section, we problematize the Brazilian self-image as a major reformist power and global leader during the second period, arguing that it was nothing but a myth. The main evidence against this distorted self-image relies on Brazilian GHG emissions, which have been much higher than the world per capita average in the whole period, dominated by emissions from deforestation in the Amazon – which is an aberration for a middle-income democracy – and, a fossilization of the energy and electricity matrix – an unseen development for an emergent economy. The climate policy instruments developed since the late 2000s – including the 2010 national climate law – have not been able to change this situation. Moreover, the official narrative that Brazil has shown high levels of climate commitment because it sharply reduced its emissions between 2005 and 2012 ignores the fact that emissions were extremely high and extremely irrational in the previous decade. Finally, we conclude.

Our assessment of both the climate self-images, and the analysis of these, is based on public documents and public speeches by the Brazilian authorities. Our focus is on climate change mitigation – which is an imminently cooperative endeavor if it is to be successful – and not on adaptation – which is mainly still a local concern.

Climate self-images and myths. Conceptualization

Countries have a self-image of their level of agency (climate power) and achievements (climate commitment) in global climate governance, which is essential to their national identity and foreign policy discourse. This self-image is constructed mainly by governments, with varying degrees of support in their societies. In democratic societies, meaningful participation of NGOs and business is necessary to consolidate and sustain climate images. Being a self-image, it is always more forgiving than an external evaluation.

A climate myth is a distorted self-image of the country's role in global climate governance, where the gap between the discourse and the actual power and commitment is strong. The bigger the gap, the larger the myth. Both climate self-images and myths have three main components: the level of agency of the country to influence the outcome of climate cooperation – climate power, – the level of benignity of its efforts to stabilize the climate system – climate commitment – and, the level of agency in climate negotiations – climate leadership (Viola and Franchini 2018). More specifically, the usual components of the climate self-image/myth are as follows:

- Relevance in terms of GHG emissions: generally indicated by the country's share of global emissions and/or its level of emissions per capita. Typically, countries with a low share of global emissions and low per capita emissions tend to emphasize this in order to sidestep international pressures for mitigation measures. Colombia is a case for the former and India for the latter.
- Climate vulnerability: countries tend to overemphasize the negative effects of climate change on their territory and/or economy in order to dilute pressures for mitigation or to appear more climate-committed. The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) is a typical case.
- Contribution to climate mitigation: in the areas of finance, low carbon technology development and transfer, national policies and, international negotiations. Countries tend to exaggerate and emphasize those actions that are convergent with mitigation and ignore those that are not, such as China highlighting the advance of renewable energy without recognizing the high proportion of coal in its electricity matrix and the continuation of construction of thermo-power plants (Sengupta 2018).
- Relationship between mitigation and international obligations: this is a central point, as countries tend to argue that they are contributing to climate stabilization more than they should; that is, that they are exceeding the demands of the CBDR (Common But Differentiated Responsibilities) principle. This is particularly true for non-Annex 1 countries such as China, Brazil, Mexico or India.
- Relationship with other relevant actors: climate self-images are relative to other countries and even to the wider international community. The narrative of the G-77+China countries is intrinsically linked to the discourse of the inaction of its developed parties in the regime. The Chinese self-image feeds on the reluctance of the US to engage in climate cooperation under President Trump.
- Relevance within climate negotiations: many countries tend to exaggerate their level of impact on the negotiating process in the climate regime, particularly during the most relevant periods (negotiation of the Climate Convention, the Kyoto Protocol, the Copenhagen Accord, the Paris Agreement), presenting themselves as “leaders.”

Climate self-image or climate myth?

To assess the difference between a country's self-image and myth – that is, to identify when an image has become a myth – it is necessary to analyze the gap between the discourse and the actual levels of climate power, climate commitment, and climate leadership in each case. To analyze the first dimension, we use the concept of climate power (Viola et al. 2012), in which the participation of countries in global emissions and their level of low carbon capital are the key indicators. Consequently, only a few countries play a central role in affecting the global climate social outcome. We refer to these nations as 'the great climate powers': The United States, the EU, and China. An encompassing and efficient cooperation scheme is unlikely to succeed without their participation (Viola and Franchini 2018). Other relevant countries, – albeit not central actors but nonetheless still important, – are called middle powers, such as Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, South Korea, Canada, and Japan. Finally, around 40 countries are small powers with very limited capacity to alter the path of climate governance whereas the rest is practically irrelevant in this regard.

Climate power implies the potential to become translated into climate leadership, that is, the capacity of a country to influence the outcome of international climate negotiations, particularly within the UNFCCC. Leadership can be positive/reformist – if it fosters cooperation and global mitigation – or negative/conservative – if it provides obstacles to this. The impact can be measured in how the premises defended by one country are, or are not, acknowledged by the regime. To assess the gap between the self-image and the actual level of climate commitment, we use the Climate Commitment Approach (CCA) (Viola and Franchini 2018), which analyses both the trajectory of GHG emissions and the density of policy responses to climate change, to evaluate whether a society is being a driver for mitigation (reformist) or acceleration of the climate crisis (conservative). The lower the level of per capita emissions and carbon intensity of GDP, and the stronger the climate policy framework (legal and bureaucratic climate infrastructure, mandatory mitigation targets, and relevant international commitments), the higher the level of climate commitment. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that myths vary over time, depending on several factors, particularly the climate standing of governments and climate momentums within the international system. The positive impact of the Paris Process on Latin-American climate commitment (Franchini 2019) and the negative impact of Donald Trump's election are examples of this.

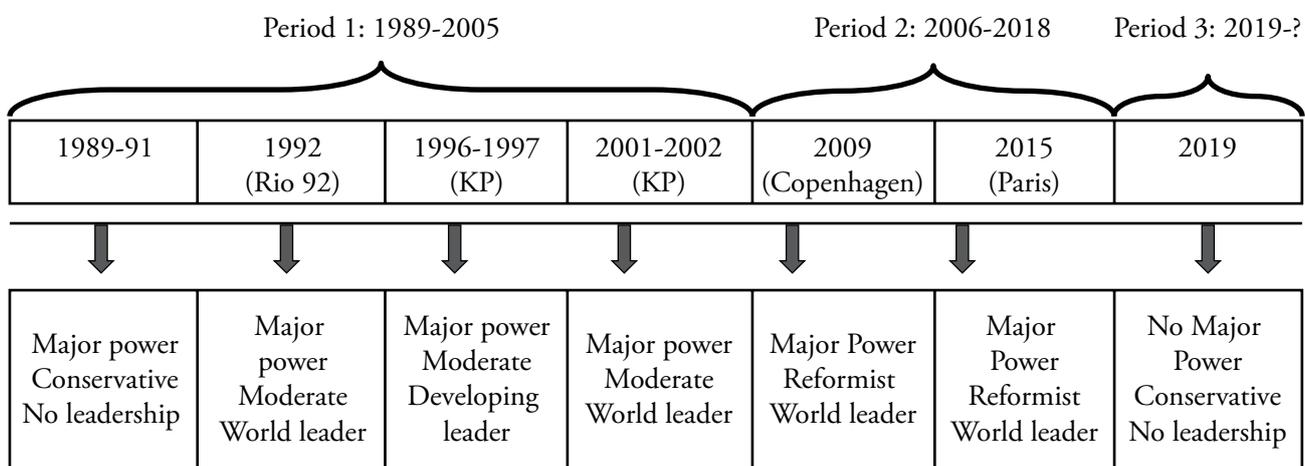
The Brazilian climate myth (1989 - 2019)

The Brazilian climate self-image implies, firstly, that the country is a central player in climate governance, mainly for two reasons: its natural assets and its political assets. The first category encompasses, particularly, the centrality of the Amazon Forest in the global carbon

cycle and the large share of global freshwater and agricultural lands. Political assets comprise, primarily, the high share of renewable sources in the country’s energy matrix (hydroelectricity and ethanol), the success in reducing emissions from Amazon deforestation since the mid-2000s and, the development of climate policies since late 2000s, particularly the 2010 national climate law (Brazil, Ministério do Meio Ambiente 2015; Viola and Franchini 2018). Accordingly, Brazil presents itself as a reformist power, and a big emergent economy that has been doing more than its fair share in terms of climate mitigation (Brazil, Ministério do Meio Ambiente 2015; Brazil, Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2016a) – this is the second dimension of Brazilian self-image. Finally, Brazil has portrayed itself as a champion of the interests of the developing world within international climate negotiations, and, at the same time, as a bridge between the developing and the developed world. In this sense, Brazil presents itself as a climate leader; a central piece in international negotiations. A radical interpretation of the CBDR principle – in line with the G-77+China – has always been a central part of this self-image of leadership. In the last three decades, the Brazilian myth has varied in terms of substance, intensity (the distance to reality), and its prominence within the foreign policy agenda of the government, but always maintained the premise of the country’s relevance and commitment in climate governance, with the recent exception of the Bolsonaro administration, as we shall see.

In this article, we focus on the most intense and developed version of this myth, which grew as Brazil was able to control deforestation in the Amazon since 2005. However, the roots of this narrative can be traced back to the early 1990s, when Brazil hosted the Rio 92 Summit. Accordingly, we have identified three periods of the Brazilian climate self-image/myth: a period of Brazil presenting itself as a major moderate climate power and leader of the developing world (1989 - 2005); a period of Brazil as a major reformist climate power and global leader (2006-2018), and; a period of Brazil renouncing the climate myth under the Bolsonaro administration (2019). Although the first two self-images were distorted, the intensity of the climate myth in the second period was considerably higher.

Figure 1. Highlights in Brazilian Climate Myth



Source: Own Elaboration

Restrained myth: major moderate power and G-77 champion in climate negotiations (1989 - 2005)

Brazil entered the international politics of climate change as a villain, on account of the huge rate of deforestation and burnings in the Amazon rainforest in the late 1980s (Brooke 1990). Accordingly, the international community and public opinion perceived Brazil as both a major climate power and as an extremely conservative one (Viola and Franchini 2018). Although only the second part was accurate – since the international community enormously exaggerated the Brazilian share of global emissions – Brazil's climate self-image was heavily influenced by this perception. Thus, the Brazilian climate myth was born as a reaction to the international myth of the country being a “burner” of the world. Moreover, as Brazil's condemnation was accompanied by some demands for international protection of the Amazon – such as those of Al Gore and François Mitterrand (Hochstetler and Keck 2007) – climate change was assimilated to the existing Amazon Paranoia (Viola and Franchini 2018); that is, the exaggerated notion among Brazil's political and security elites that the region was coveted by the North because of its immense wealth. As the region constitutes half of Brazil's territory, with little state presence, the idea of a sovereign threat easily took root. Somehow, the Brazilian government was pushed to create a defensive narrative by the discourse and actions of these actors within the international community. Brazil could have ignored those critics or invested in sustainable actions, but it chose to exaggerate its achievements instead of actually making them.

The Brazilian myth has, nonetheless, a bright side if compared to other emergent economies: it was developed in the 1990s, earlier than those of Mexico and China, and was influenced by some positive features of Brazil as an open society after the democratization in the mid-1980s, namely; a strong civil society; grass root democracy; the process of the 1988 constitutional reform; a strong environmental movement; and a productive system relatively open to the world in terms of investment. Consequently, in the first decade and half of the climate regime, Brazil would, simultaneously, embrace the major climate power perception as part of its self-image and counter the climate villain narrative. The country thus deployed a defensive position regarding mitigation obligations from the developing world and forest protection during the Kyoto negotiations; all measures rooted in the aforementioned nationalistic/sovereign concerns (Viola 2002).

The Rio 92 Summit was the first major response by the Brazilian government to change the country's international image and present itself as a more committed power. The possibility of hosting the Summit – and more broadly, the convenience of trying to counter Brazil's negative international image – divided positions inside President Sarney's administration (1985-90). Yet, ultimately the special adviser Ruben Ricupero's position of presenting a reliable Brazil prevailed over the more nationalistic positions, which were heavily influenced by the Amazon Paranoia. The strategy was decidedly embraced by President Collor de Mello (1990-1992), following his approximation to the Western Democracies.

In January 1991, President Collor stated:

My government, in defending the environment, has tried to be consistent and adopt exemplary positions, to the point that we have managed to move from being criminals in the process of international denunciations against the country to being at the forefront of global ecological initiatives (Brazil, Ministério de Relações Exteriores 1991).

The Rio 92 had a profound impact within Brazil, increasing the relevance of environmental issues in the domestic realm and portraying a more positive image of the country internationally. Accordingly, it also contributed to feed the myth. In September 1992, Minister Celso Lafer, addressing the United Nations General Assembly, stated that the Rio 92 was the greatest diplomatic event since the end of World War II and, regarding Brazil's role:

The Brazilian delegation played fully the mediation role that made the success of the conference possible. Perhaps never before has a developing country played such an important role in a global international negotiation so easily (Correa 2007, 548).

During Cardoso's Presidency (1995-2002), environmental/climate issues somehow faded from the governmental priorities, with the exception of the period 2001-2002, as we shall see. However, within the UNFCCC negotiations, the Brazilian diplomacy continued to reproduce the self-image of the country as a major moderate power with high impact over climate negotiations and an advocate of the interests of the developing world.

At the start of negotiations of the Kyoto Protocol (1996), Brazil proposed the Clean Development Fund to finance less carbon-intensive development in non-Annex I countries. Almost immediately the United States proposed to transform it into the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), and Brazil agreed. The proposal easily reached consensus and was incorporated into the Kyoto Protocol (Viola 2002). However, since 1997, the Brazilian government has presented the CDM as an exclusively Brazilian proposal as a way of sustaining the climate myth.

Also in 1997, Brazil proposed an extremely radical interpretation of the CBDR principle, labeled "The Brazilian Proposal," to account for the historical responsibilities of countries in causing climate change. The Proposal stated that GHG emissions should be counted not since 1990, as defined in the UNFCCC, but since 1850 (Viola and Franchini 2018). To avoid counting Brazil's disastrous deforestation performance, the emissions to be accounted for would be from energy, industry and transport only, not LULUCF. With this interpretation of CBDR, Brazil became the champion of most developing countries, as they could continue to increase emissions for many decades until the historically accumulated emissions reached the level of developed countries. Accordingly, the Brazilian proposal was contradictory to any rationality

in terms of avoiding dangerous climate change. For example, the gigantic increase in emissions from China and India in the last 15 years was protected and justified by the wording of the Brazilian proposal. Thus, India's radical approach to "climate neocolonialism" was inspired by the Brazilian proposal, as was China's position that its emissions would only peak around 2050 (Viola 2002). In this case, Brazil had indeed assumed a position of leadership within the UNFCCC, but a negative one, being the most radical voice of the alleged global clash between a center of developed countries responsible for the climate problem and a developing periphery that was forced to pay for it, even though it had not contributed significantly to its existence.

After a period of relative calm, the Brazilian leadership narrative re-emerged during the final negotiations of the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, when the Cardoso administration was very active in a partnership with the EU and Japan to reach a final agreement after President Bush's decision to withdraw from the KP. In several speeches, FHC criticized the lack of commitment of the US government, stating that the Bush administration's decision "was a step backwards" and that Brazil should have to pursue a leadership role, making it "necessary to talk to a lot of people, including China and India, which are developing countries like us" (França 2001)

Unrestrained myth: major power, mitigation role model and, global leader in climate negotiations (2006 - 2018)

After a few years (2003 - 2005) of decline of the climate agenda, both internationally and in Brazil, the second stage in the evolution of the Brazilian self-image gradually took form around 2006 - 2007, when the positive results of deforestation control policies in the Amazon became evident. As we have shown in previous works (Viola and Franchini 2014; 2018), the process of sustained reduction of deforestation rates – from 24,000 km² in 2004 to 4,500 km² in 2012 – was the most relevant factor that allowed Brazil to increase its level of climate commitment in the period; thus, overcoming what we have called the "Amazonian Impotence" (Viola and Franchini 2018). Accordingly, all those years of national shame and defensive positions regarding the Amazon rapidly became a matter of national pride.

In terms of the self-image, the translation of this change was almost immediate: in the 2006 UNFCCC COP in Nairobi, the Minister of the Environment, Marina Silva, proposed a financial mechanism to stimulate deforestation control policies in developing countries and even offered Brazilian technology and knowhow to help poor countries (Mendes and Mattos 2006). President Lula defended the proposal – which broke a tradition to avoid forest management in the climate regime – saying:

"Brazil has a clean energy matrix" and that the 30% reduction in the pace of deforestation in the Amazon recorded in the last two years "accredits the country to present its proposal at COP-12" (Thuswhol 2006).

In the 2008 Poznan COP, Minister Minc presented the international community with the new National Plan on Climate Change, – the first to set mitigation targets for Brazil. Minc stated in an interview:

Brazil's National Climate Change Plan foresees 70% reduction in deforestation by 2018, which is equivalent to 4.8 billion tons of CO₂. This is more than all the effort made by developed countries in Kyoto. In addition, there is Ethanol, which will not occupy 1 hectare of the Amazon and Pantanal and will not take up food space (Ximenes 2008).

But the climax of the unrestrained Brazilian myth came in late 2009, in the preface of the Copenhagen COP 15, when President Lula announced that Brazil would commit to a voluntary mitigation target for 2020, “to show our American and European friends that in Brazil we not only talk, but do” (Munari 2009). Accordingly, Brazil was now presenting itself not only as a major power leading the developing countries, but as a global role model for mitigation governance. In this spirit, the Brazilian President declared that his country was ready to transfer resources for the Green Climate Fund. Moreover, almost one month before the Copenhagen Summit, President Lula also criticized Brazil's big emerging partners (particularly China and India) and the U.S. for not adopting ambitious emissions reduction pledges, and hereupon signed a reformist declaration with President Sarkozy of France. During the joint conference with the French President, Lula declared:

I think this document signed by President Sarkozy and myself, it is more than a letter of principle. I think it becomes our climate bible. That is, and we, obviously, who go to Copenhagen and go to the subsequent meetings we hold with the other countries, to guide them towards a paradigm close to this here or the same here (Itamaraty 2009).

According to Lula's image of the country, Brazil was guiding the world by example by setting ambitious mitigation goals. In another part of the same statement, he added: “So we're convinced that if the Brazilians take this as a symbol, we'll surprise the world by doing it faster and maybe even more” (Itamaraty 2009). Ultimately, this peak of extravagance of the Brazilian climate myth was short-lived, since Brazil not only backed away from criticizing, but also aligned itself with the conservative positions of the BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) countries in COP 15, only a few weeks after Lula's meeting with Sarkozy. The contribution to the GCF never materialized (Green Climate Fund Data)¹.

The Brazilian position in Copenhagen, although less conservative than China and India's regarding the voluntary commitments, did not involve a change in the radical interpretation of CBDR: Brazil accepted to commit to a mitigation target not because it was an international

¹ <https://www.greenclimate.fund/how-we-work/resource-mobilization>

obligation, but because Brazil wanted to, as it was a reformist climate power (Viola and Franchini 2018; Hochstetler and Milkoreit 2015). In spite of these inconsistencies, the climate myth continued strong during 2010, the last year of Lula's Presidency, and was further supported by the sanctioning of the national climate law in early 2010 and, the electoral performance of Marina Silva in the 2010 presidential election, in which she got around 19% of the national vote, running on a platform heavily defined by climate/environmental issues.

During Dilma Rousseff's first tenure (2011 - 2014), the myth went into a period of low visibility, albeit maintaining the core narrative of Lula's tenure. Accordingly, climate change vanished from the center of the governmental agenda, following the lead of a new President that did not consider it a relevant issue (Viola and Franchini 2018). Not even the hosting of the Rio+20 changed that reality, as the Rio 92 had done two decades before. On the contrary, the previous successes of Brazil in mitigation were downplayed during the 2012 Summit, in which the government chose to highlight its progress on economic and social issues (Brazil 2011; Viola and Franchini 2012). In the UNFCCC, Brazil continued to present itself as a key committed player, however resuming the more conservative G-77 style discourse that it had abandoned during the second tenure of Lula da Silva. The return of the Brazilian Proposal in the Warsaw COP in 2013 (Viola and Franchini 2014) and, the concentric circles submission in the Lima COP (Brazil 2014) the following year, can be seen in this light.

In 2015, however, the Brazilian climate self-image of a reformist major power came into full force again, as Rousseff was struggling to find positive agendas in the midst of the crisis that eventually would result in her impeachment in August 2016. In July 2015, President Rousseff met with President Obama in the U.S., and for the first time since 2009, the Brazilian government announced new mitigation measures, aiming at the COP 21 in Paris. At the meeting, Dilma resorted to the Brazilian climate myth, which was supported by President Obama, who stated that Brazil was a world leader in global affairs (Silva 2015). To make things even, Dilma also acknowledged the American myth of climate leadership. Both images of climate power, leadership, and mitigation success can be seen in the joint statement:

The Presidents highlighted the fact that, since 2005, Brazil and the United States have reduced greenhouse gas emissions in absolute terms more than any other countries in the world. [...] In the run-up to the UN Climate Conference in Paris, both countries are respectively putting forward strong post-2020 contributions consistent with their determination to show global leadership (The White House 2015).

At the 2015 Paris COP, Brazil reached another extreme of climate mythology, as Minister Teixeira presented the country as a low carbon economy, grounded on the share of renewables in the energy matrix and the success in deforestation control (Brazil, Ministério do Meio Ambiente 2015). Moreover, Brazil, the low carbon economy, was willing to make an additional effort in Paris, presenting a very ambitious contribution according to the official narrative:

[...] it is evident that Brazil's iNDC, while consistent with its national circumstances and capabilities, is far more ambitious than what would correspond to Brazil's marginal relative responsibility for the global average temperature increase (Brazil, Ministério do Meio Ambiente 2015, 6).

This climate self-image at the end of Rousseff's administration underwent a subtle conservative twist compared to President Lula, for whom Brazil was ready to assume a key reformist role because of the advances in mitigation, whereas for Dilma, those advances were a line of defense against any further international pressure for more commitment. For Dilma, Brazil had already done plenty (Franchini 2016).

During Michel Temer's administration, the climate myth reached another stage of low profile, but still with some extravagances. In September 2016, in a speech celebrating the ratification of the Paris Agreement by the Brazilian authorities, Foreign Minister José Serra stated:

Brazil has an undeniable leadership role in climate change issues. We have actively contributed at all stages of the negotiation - since Rio 92 - and we are now one of the first major economies to ratify it. We have shown creativity and our ability to build bridges between countries at different levels of development (Brazil, Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2016b).

The myth was also present with regards to energy issues, particularly the Biofuture Platform, as stated by Minister Aloysio Nunes in October 2017:

The Platform will also affirm Brazil's vanguard position in clean energy, with an effective contribution of the country to the construction of a social and environmentally sustainable global economy [...] (Nunes 2017).

The end of the myth: climate change under Jair Bolsonaro (2019 - ?)

The election of Jair Bolsonaro in October 2018 has been a major change in Brazilian politics, crystallizing a process of profound transformations that started around June 2013 and was accelerated by the economic, political and moral bankruptcy of the Workers Party's rule. Polarization across Brazilian society and political actors, internal power struggles within the Bolsonaro government, a chaotic federal administration with a low-profile President and a major uncertainty regarding the economic and social agenda of the new government mark the current political situation in Brazil.

In spite of this uncertainty, it is clear that climate change – or any other major environmental issue – is more peripheral to the Bolsonaro administration than any other in the last three decades. Moreover, the President has shown indifference and even open hostility towards the agenda, promising to withdraw Brazil from the Paris Agreement – even though he later rectified (Soares and Grandelle 2018), – and actually withdrew the country's candidature to host the 2019 COP. Also, bureaucracies

engaging specifically with climate change have disappeared from the Ministries of the Environment (MMA) and of Foreign Affairs (Girardi 2019). Thus, Brazil's climate self-image has suffered major changes. The country's image as a major climate power committed to the good of humanity has been replaced with a more nationalistic rhetoric according to which climate cooperation is a threat to sovereignty. As President Bolsonaro stated – wrongfully – in December 2018 regarding the Paris Agreement

Brazil is required to reforest an enormous area, the size of the state of Rio de Janeiro until 2030, if it doesn't, the sanctions will come. In the first moment, political sanction, then economic, and in a third moment, there is the sanction of force (Soares and Grandelle 2018).

The hostility regarding the climate agenda is also shared by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ernesto Araújo, who has stated that the “ideology” of climate change is a creation of leftist forces to increase the power of international organizations over national societies as well as a strategy to favor China's economy (Di Cunto et al. 2018). It is still early to make a solid assessment of the future of the Brazilian climate self-image, but it is possible to state that during the Bolsonaro administration it will experience a similar process to what happens in the U.S. whenever a republican President is in office: no climate myth will be deployed since the authorities are hostile to the topic and not interested in adopting one.

Before we enter into the assessment of the Brazilian climate self-image, it seems relevant to briefly make two important points. First, the trajectory of the Brazilian climate self-image has been heterogeneous over time, depending on the priorities of national administrations and the state of international cooperation. However, within those periods there have been different versions – or intensities – within the federal government. In general, the Ministries of Science and Technology and Foreign Affairs deployed a more radical version of the myth, arguing that Brazil was a role model in climate affairs. On the contrary, the Ministry of the Environment – particularly during Marina Silva's and Minc's tenures – operated with a more moderate version, pressuring inside the administration for a more committed position regarding mitigation. This is a common feature of the Brazilian fragmented structure of government, which impacts not only climate/environmental issues, but all major areas of policy making (Mainwaring 1999).

Second, Brazil's self-image as a major reformist climate power took hold among many other actors beyond the Brazilian government, – both domestic and international, – which consequently became enablers of the climate myth. Domestically, a significant part of the climate/environment epistemic community – which is sound and internationally respected – supported the radical interpretation of CBDR during the Kyoto negotiations and, in the following decade, chose to highlight the marvels of deforestation control and emission reduction, downplaying the irrational path of emissions during the previous 15 years. Deforestation control also reinforced the climate myth amongst Brazilian NGOs, many of them with direct presence within the MMA during Marina Silva's and Minc's tenures. Moreover, a major part of the environmental movement –

similarly captured by the Amazon Impotence² (Viola and Franchini 2018) – saw the success in deforestation control as an epic achievement of the Brazilian society, when in reality, it was a fairly low-cost endeavor, both economically and politically. In any case, this overestimation reinforced the perception within the community that everything was possible in Brazil, even a key reformist role in global climate governance, if enough political will was deployed. In this calculation, basic considerations of economic and political constraints were ignored or seriously downplayed.

Progressively, different actors in the international system began to reproduce the image of Brazil as a major reformist power. This was particularly clear from the UNFCCC negotiations, in which the delegates always are eager to show that sound international action is actually being undertaken. Accordingly, the E.U. and the U.S. used the Brazilian case to show how non-Annex 1 countries were able to reduce emissions and be a part of the global mitigation effort. A 2013 Brazil-E.U. joint statement declared:

They emphasized the significant and consistent reduction in the deforestation rate in the Amazon biome achieved by Brazil. They expressed their support to further EU-Brazil technical cooperation with the view to replicate and scale up these achievements in other biomes and other countries [...] (Council of Europe Union 2013).

Moreover, since Brazil has been a hesitant power in international negotiations – with the potential to be a committed actor – the international community embraced the Brazilian myth in order to empower climate-friendly Brazilian actors to increase the country's commitment. Although these positive expectations were scarcely delivered, some movements of Brazil from time to time, like convincing India to dampen its radical position upon Paris 2015, seem enough to project some hope. In an environment in which good news are scarce, having a mitigation champion among the big emerging economies surely seemed attractive. In the end, Brazil was a good case to believe in: it was a big democracy, with an expanding economy and reducing inequality, led by a figure and a Party – President Lula da Silva from the Workers Party – that was a symbol of personal and political overcoming. Since the mid-2000s, it was also protecting the global environment by preserving the Amazon Rainforest. Never mind the holes in that image, which is the topic of the next section.

Assessing the Brazilian climate myth

The self-image that Brazil has projected in climate governance in the last three decades has been a myth, since the official discourse hardly has fit the actual level of climate power and commitment of the country. The image of the leadership role in UNFCCC negotiations is more realistic at some points in history, as we shall show. On climate power, Brazil has

²The notion that Brazil would be able to control deforestation because it was linked the path dependence of its economic development.

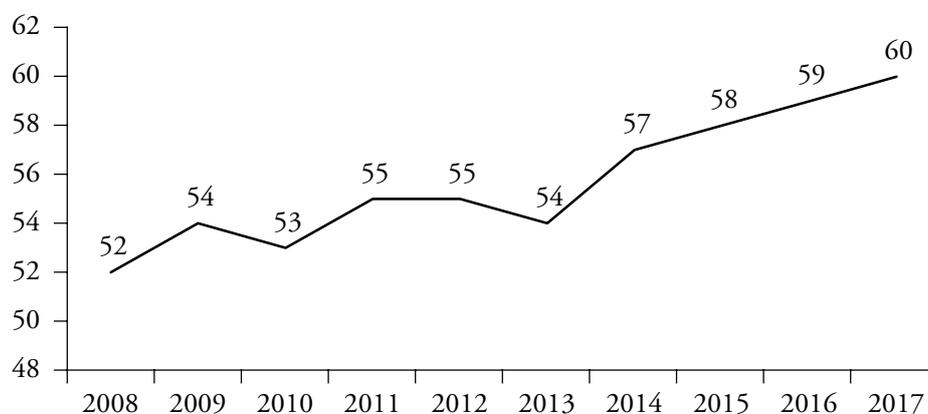
never been a major power, since its emissions never have surpassed 5% of the global total (Climatewatch Data³). In terms of low carbon capital, whereas Brazil made some advances in hydroelectricity and biofuels, it never impacted the global market for low carbon technologies. Moreover, as the technological race accelerated in the 2010s – particularly on solar, wind and batteries – Brazil lagged behind. In terms of leadership in climate negotiations, Brazil was a climate leader during most of the first period (1989 - 2005), but an extremely conservative one, leading the developing world to avoid any kind of mitigation effort. During the second period (2006 - 2018), Brazilian influence in climate negotiations progressively diminished, as China and India became key players in the Convention. In the third period, Brazil seems to have abandoned any kind of leadership ambition.

But the major problem with the Brazilian climate self-image has been on the climate commitment dimension, namely, the extreme irrationality of Brazilian emissions, which was systematically downplayed when not outright ignored by the government, international negotiators, and part of the epistemic community and NGOs, – both domestic and international.

This extreme irrationality derived from the huge levels of deforestation in the Amazon, which accounted for between 34–80% of the country's total emissions in the last three decades (SEEG Data). Per capita emissions in the Amazon region during the period 2000-2005 surpassed 60 tons – a higher level than that of global emission champions, such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Brunei. Moreover, even when Brazil was able to partially control deforestation from the mid-2000s, the levels were extremely high for a middle-income democracy. Finally, after almost a decade of decline, deforestation began to increase again in 2013.

The energy sector's trajectory was also inconsistent with the image that Brazil displayed. Differently from almost every other major economy, the Brazilian energy and electricity matrix underwent a process of fossilization during the last decade (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Non-renewables in Brazilian Primary Energy Production (%). 2008-2017



Source: Own elaboration based on Brazil, Empresa de Pesquisa Energética 2018.

³ According to SEEG Data (http://plataforma.seeg.eco.br/total_emission), however, Brazilian emissions accounted for around 9% of global total in 2004.

Brazil maintained the myth of a clean energy country not only when its major low carbon assets – hydroelectricity and ethanol – were retracting, but also when major resources were directed to develop the oil industry after the discovery of the pre-salt reservoirs, through the mega-capitalization of Petrobras in 2010 and the massive subsidies to gasoline and diesel consumption between 2007 and 2014 (Viola and Franchini 2018). Following this path, the financial and managerial re-construction of Petrobras since 2016 has occurred under a strategy of extracting as much oil and as quickly as possible, engaging the company in a global race to the bottom among oil corporations, before fossil fuel constraints advance worldwide.

Moreover, it is possible to argue that even hydroelectric and ethanol developments in Brazil have been transformed into individual myths, because contrary to the official discourse, they were not designed to address environmental concerns, but rather basic considerations of energy security and traditional cost-benefit calculations (Viola and Franchini 2018). While the hydroelectricity discourse tends to downplay some environmental disasters such as the Balbina Dam, the ethanol discourse tends to ignore the high carbon intensity of the transportation subsector in Brazil and, more recently, the choice made by the global industry to invest in electric cars, instead of biofuels. In this sense, the revival of the Ethanol Diplomacy through the Biofutures Platform also seems out of touch with reality. Finally, the Brazilian climate self-image was a myth because the advances in climate policy experienced during the late 2000s proved to be limited and short-termed. After a period of climate activism – from 2008 to early 2010 – mitigation policies in the country first stagnated and then declined (Franchini 2019). The core example of this process was the return of deforestation in the Amazon in 2013.

The Brazilian climate myth has, however, been more intense in the second period than in the first one. Indeed, between 1989 and 2005 Brazil accounted for a higher share of global emissions (Climatewatch Data) and was actually a major player in the UNFCCC process, leading most of the developing nations to conservative positions regarding mitigation, including China and India. In terms of climate commitment, although Brazil was a climate villain because of the extreme emissions coming from the Amazon deforestation, it never presented itself as a global role model in terms of mitigation, as it did in the second period. The narrative implied that Brazil was exempt from mitigation efforts, based on the interpretation of the CBDR principle.

The distance between discourse and reality grew exponentially in the second period (2006 - 2018). Brazil continued to present itself as a major power, even when its share of global emissions was declining – because of its own successes in deforestation control as well as the souring emissions in China and India – and the low carbon capital of the country was diminishing – particularly because Brazil largely missed the non-traditional renewables revolution. Moreover, this was a period of decline of Brazil's traditional low carbon assets – ethanol and hydroelectricity – and rise of the oil industry. Although Brazil continued to be influential in the UNFCCC, it did lose centrality, first having to share the stage with other big emerging economies through BASIC, and then witnessing the rise of China as the main non-Annex 1

negotiating party (Dong 2017). Accordingly, if Brazil left a strong mark on the KP process, its footprint in the post-Copenhagen period was lighter.

In terms of climate commitment, the actual – but limited – successes of Brazil during this period were exaggerated beyond recognition by the official discourse. Accordingly, the self-image of Brazil being a low carbon economy ignored not only the above–the–world average per capita emissions and elevated carbon intensity of GDP (Climatewatch Data), but the high levels of emissions coming from deforestation in the Amazon and Cerrado biomes, the fossilization of the energy and electricity matrix, the ethanol decline, the incentives to individual transportation and gasoline and diesel consumption, the stimulus given to the oil industry (also paired with crony capitalism practices as revealed by the Lava-Jato investigation), the stagnation and retraction of the National Policy on Climate Change, and the deployment of an economic policy oriented towards fostering economic growth at all costs (Viola and Franchini 2018).

In spite of this overwhelming evidence, the core of the Brazilian climate myth was maintained even during the Michel Temer administration, although it abandoned the delusional narrative of a low carbon economy. The deepening of the deforestation process in the Amazon, the alliance between the Temer government and the agribusiness sector, and more broadly, the deep degradation of Brazilian public institutions on account of the corruption schemes have further debunked the Brazilian myth. Finally, the Bolsonaro government opted to abandon the myth of the great reformist power and adopted a narrative of disregard for the governance of climate change and Brazil's role in it.

Conclusion

Countries have their own self-image of the role they play in the global governance of climate change, both in terms of agency and commitment. If that self-image does not correspond to the country's real level of climate power, commitment, and leadership, it becomes a myth. In this article we have defined, firstly, what climate self-images and myths are. Secondly, we have introduced a way of assessing whether a self-image is a myth or not, based on the operational concepts of climate power, commitment, and leadership. Finally, we have evaluated in detail the Brazilian climate self-image between 1989 and 2019, concluding that in almost the entire period, the Brazilian authorities deployed a climate myth, a distorted self-image that exaggerated the characteristics of the country within its three dimensions: power, commitment, and leadership. Consequently, Brazil presented itself as a great reformist climate power committed to the stabilization of the climate system through domestic action and foreign policy, always defending the interests of the developing world through the lens of the CBDR principle.

Myths and self-images change both in terms of substance and intensity. Consequently, we have identified three periods in the Brazilian climate myth. In the first (1989 - 2005), Brazilian authorities displayed the image of a moderate great power and leader of the developing world,

trying to counter the international narrative of Brazil as a climate villain. Irrational emissions from Amazon deforestation limited the possibility of Brazil presenting itself as a reformist actor in terms of mitigation, although the country still claimed to be doing its fair share based on economic development considerations.

In the second period (2006 - 2018), the myth was unleashed, and Brazil presented itself as a great reformist power, a global model for climate change mitigation capable of strongly influencing the path of the UNFCCC negotiations. Controlling deforestation in the Amazon and President Lula's leadership were central to this development, which was strongly associated with the myth of Brazil as an emerging power in the international system, capable of shaping global policy. In this period, important national actors supported the Brazilian climate myth – politicians, senior officials, corporations, NGOs, media and even a sector of the scientific community. Also, relevant international actors supported the Brazilian myth, either by sharing a radical interpretation of the CBDR principle with the country – such as China, India, Indonesia, South Africa – or because Brazil seemed less reluctant than other large emerging countries to assume mitigation commitments – such as the European Union and the United States under Obama.

In assessing the Brazilian self-image in both periods, we concluded that they were myths, due to the distance between the discourse and Brazil's actual levels of power, commitment, and climate leadership. In the first period, Brazil's self-image was a myth due to the extreme irrationality of Amazon deforestation, the exaggeration of the country's capabilities to alter the global climate social outcome and the conservative position of the country in the UNFCCC negotiations, which led the developing world to a radical interpretation of the CBDR principle. Brazil was not a cooperative developing country doing its fair share of the effort, although it played a leading role in UNFCCC negotiations in most of the period.

In the second period, the myth was more intense, as Brazil continued a major power narrative as its levels of climate power were declining and its role in the UNFCCC negotiations was being overshadowed by other non-Annex 1 countries, particularly China. However, the key aspect of the mythical characteristic of the Brazilian climate self-image was on the climate commitment side. Consequently, the Brazilian discourse deliberately ignored that the success of controlling deforestation was based on the previous irrational trajectory of LULUCF emissions and that it only lasted until 2012; that the energy matrix was fossilizing; that huge amounts of resources were being channeled towards the expansion of the oil industry, also to fuel corruption schemes; and that economic policy was aimed at fostering economic growth at all costs.

The third period (2019 - ?) is somewhat different, as the climate myth has been almost abandoned. In fact, after the major changes in Brazilian domestic politics since 2013, the climate self-image of a major reformist power with global leadership has been discarded by the Bolsonaro government, which has described the climate agenda itself as a myth and a threat to the country's sovereignty, returning to a kind of Amazon paranoia. However, even if the myth has

been dramatically undermined, the potential for reactivation does exist, should another political coalition win the general elections of 2022, given how large and widespread the obsession with international status in Brazilian society is.

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