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Produced natures through the lens of biodiversity conservation and tourism: the Ponta Negra Caiçara in the Atlantic Forest Coast of Brazil

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Understanding nature as an outcome of organising discourses generated through relative experiences of our surroundings has been the groundwork of a political ecology that deals with the distribution of environmental justice among people with different degrees of power. In this paper, we examine how the environmental legislation and the tourism industry have constructed the term Caiçara as a way to categorise the inhabitants of the Atlantic Forest Coast of Brazil, in ways that meet their goals, but in turn occludes the discourse of the Caiçara themselves. Ethnographic research conducted in Ponta Negra, a small coastal community located at the heart of the Juatinga Ecological Reserve (Paraty, Rio de Janeiro State), as well as a review of key legislation, management plans and tourism materials form the empirical basis of this research. First, we offer a critical examination of the historical origin of the term Caiçara. We then compare contradictory ideas of Caiçara produced by Brazilian environmental legislation and the tourism industry. While the environmental legislation has characterised the Caiçara as fallen angels who are no longer conservation allies, the tourism industry has profited by selling them as ecologically noble savages who still live in harmony with the environment. Our analysis shows how Ponta Negra people have become objects of powerful discourses of nature that hinder the recognition of their collective rights and weaken their position to negotiate for their own desires and aspirations related to their identity and livelihoods.

Keywords: constructed natures; political ecology; protected areas; Caiçara; Atlantic Forest Coast; Brazil

Introduction

The conservation of nature through the use of protected areas is often taken as a benign process. However, as Castree (1995) has emphasised, nature at particular places and times is an outcome of discourse intersecting with power. There are often multiple discourses of nature that overlap in both time and space. Those with more power are often able to institute their discourse through policy, regulations and enforcement occluding those discourses that contest or diverge from their own. Our main goal in this paper is to consider how discourses of nature can subsume human inhabitants within a nature requiring protection and through neoliberal approaches of conservation, become part of the marketing

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discourses to finance protection (Igoe and Brockington 2007, Fletcher and Neves 2010, Büscher *et al.* 2012).

Protected areas have been critiqued due to the multitude of injustices experienced by human inhabitants of such spaces. Denial of rights related to land ownership, use of and access to natural resources and basic services, as well as economic and political marginalisation are frequently documented (West *et al.* 2006). While eviction is perhaps one of the most direct and well-studied consequences of the aforementioned injustices (Chapin 2004, Agrawal and Redford 2009), protected areas also affect individuals and societies who remain within or close to their borders by imposing on them the discursive categories of the ecologically noble savage (Ulloa 2005). The inhabitants of protected areas are constructed as if they were part of a pristine nature and in need of protection by an external agent (Ramos 1998) and in that way become discursively compatible with the conservation objects of conservation authorities. Tourism enterprises often appropriate and reinforce this discourse when they promote, under the label of ecotourism, their services in human inhabited protected areas (Fletcher and Neves 2010). The ecologically noble savage discourse ascribes inhabitants of protected areas with identities and lifestyles that do not match with their realities, needs and aspirations (West *et al.* 2006). This discourse also imposes a regulatory package designed to meet conservation goals that renders protected area inhabitants powerless to manage the lands they have historically inhabited and denies them access to the resources from which they have benefited (Almudi and Berkes 2010). When ecologically noble savages do not behave as expected, they become fallen angels who, by losing their connection and harmony with nature, are now deemed a threat to that nature. Exclusion from these spaces, and loss of access to the associated natural resources, results in their social and economic marginalisation (Adams 2003, Ulloa 2005).

Through our ethnographic experience with the people from the small coastal community of Ponta Negra, located in the Juatinga Ecological Reserve (REJ for its acronym in Portuguese), within the Municipality of Paraty (Rio de Janeiro), we examine how the term *Caiçara* has become a discursive category eclectically employed in environmental legislation and tourism development to identify, interact with and ultimately marginalise the rural peoples from the Atlantic Forest Coast of Brazil. *Caiçara* is a widely used, popular and academic term to identify the people who inhabit the Atlantic Forest Coast of Brazil. The definition of this term is generally linked to the historical origin and the productive activities of these people. A *Caiçara*, as described in mainstream media, as well as academic literature, is somebody with mixed Portuguese, African and Amerindian descent who has maintained the practice of natural resources harvesting activities, such as fishing and shifting agriculture (Adams 2003). Through everyday interactions, meetings, legislation, management plans and tourism materials, the environmental authority that manages the protected areas along the south-eastern coast of Brazil and the tourism economy in the same region have constructed and operationalised a discourse of the *Caiçara*. The traditional population for which this is employed has been used to justify rural people's ecological and economic marginalisation as well as the suppression of local and individual development initiatives.

Environmental legislation has produced a regulatory frame that circumscribes the allowable practices of a *Caiçara* livelihood without attention to the desirability or viability of such a livelihood for contemporary coastal peoples living in the area (Adams 2000). Likewise, ecotourism packages seen as a means to fund conservation initiatives in the region, and provide alternative livelihoods for its inhabitants, create a *Caiçara* mirage that beckons international and national tourists to experience a way of life free from the travails of the modern world (Alves 2007). The Janus coin of the *Caiçara* imaginary locks

people who are identified, or identify themselves under that label, into a past controlled by the State and a future by marketing campaigns. Both of these deny them a voice in determining their own identity and livelihoods. Ponta Negra's location within the REJ and its transitional economy from natural resource use to tourism service provision have enticed constant interaction among residents, the protected area authority and actors in the regional tourism economy. Although this case offers a deep insight into the effects of environmental discourses in a small village, it also captures broader trends playing out across the Atlantic Forest Coast region (Adams 2003, Vianna 2008).

The social construction of nature has been a long-standing matter of debate in the social sciences (Castree 1995). Understanding nature as an outcome of organising discourses generated from relative experiences of our surroundings has been central to the work of political ecology. It has emphasised the distribution of environmental justice among people with different degrees of power in the wake of the expansion of capitalism and its more recent expression, neoliberalism (Biersack 2006, Büscher *et al.* 2012). We employ an anti-essentialist political ecology lens (Escobar 1999a, 2008), which is a framework that is part of this tradition. Through its use, we identify the discourses associated with Caiçara, and their environmental relations, which both enable and constrain rural coastal people's everyday life, land rights and access to natural resources. Understanding the environment as a network of relations within which an individual is situated and that is developed contingently through experience and practice, implies that multiple environments, or perceptions of them, emerge and subsist within the same physical settings. In this framework, Escobar (1999a) refers to this multiplicity of co-existing environments as "nature regimes". The environment, therefore, is: "differently experienced according to one's social position and that it is differently produced by different groups or in different historical periods" (Escobar 1999b, p. 5). In this case, we examine the discursive origins of Caiçara, how it has been appropriated and deployed by the REJ's authority and the regional tourism industry of the region, as well as the experience rural peoples have associated with being called and calling themselves in that way.

Biodiversity conservation projects, such as the REJ, have employed this understanding of the Caiçara as a parameter against which to deem the current economic engagements of rural coastal peoples. This has resulted in their position that such engagements as counter-productive for the conservation goals of the reserve and, thereby, to identify the human residents as fallen angels and adversaries of biological conservation. Likewise, the tourism economy has benefited from this understanding of coastal people by portraying them as a timeless, exotic cultural lure of the Atlantic Forest. Meanwhile, the meaning of Caiçara for those who have been bestowed with it is associated with the historical relation they have had with the environment in which they live: *I am Caiçara because I was born here.*

After a brief description of the study community and data collection procedures employed, the first results section presents the historical origin of coastal rural peoples and traces the origins of the usage of the term Caiçara. As we trace back the origin of Caiçara as a term, we contrast these depictions against the critiques by Ramos (1998) and Adams (2000, 2003) of the ecologically noble savage trope in the context of Brazilian Indigenous and traditional Peoples. This allows us to then turn to an examination of how the Brazilian environmental law has conceptualised the Caiçara as a type of traditional population. Next, we review how REJ's management authority has applied these ideas when interacting with the reserve's human inhabitants to characterise them as fallen angels. In the third section, we examine how the tourism industry, through their promotional materials, has romantically portrayed the Caiçara as ecologically noble savages who still live in harmony with the environment. The fourth, and final results section, counters the

aforementioned discourses by presenting the perspectives of Ponta Negra inhabitants as well as their current innovations and economic development initiatives with which they participate in the regional economy. An analysis of these discourses shows how environmental legislation and tourism industry impede the emergence of an authentic discourse from the inhabitants. A discourse from their perspective of what it means to be Caiçara and the adaptations that are needed to recreate a livelihood that will sustain them in a dynamic and changing environment such as the Atlantic Forest Coast.

Study community and methods

Ponta Negra is located on the Atlantic Forest Coast of Brazil and the closest urban centre is Paraty, a small tourist city with a resident population of approximately 40,000 (Figure 1). With a population of 158 (100 of whom are children), Ponta Negra's main economic sectors are commercial fishing and tourism, followed by shifting agriculture, and local building construction. Ponta Negra's location inside the REJ makes it an isolated community. REJ authorities have limited natural resource harvesting activities, such as shifting agriculture and hunting, and infrastructure development, especially if it is related to the tourism sector. Furthermore, there is no electricity and the basic aqueduct is comprised of rubber hoses that take untreated water from the streams that cross the community. Ponta Negra has no grocery stores or road access. Reaching the community from Paraty requires a one-hour trip by public transit combined with either a 30-minute boat trip or an 8-km-long hike along a trail through the forest (Idrobo 2014).

This paper draws upon ethnographic research conducted from May 2010 to February 2011 and in July 2012 that allowed the development of a deep understanding of Ponta Negra's everyday life, including the livelihoods of its inhabitants, harvesting activities and interactions with the REJ authority, representatives of the tourism industry and other stakeholders. Our fieldwork recorded not only the voices of the multiple actors involved in the production of Caiçara discourse but also the ways by which such discourses are enacted, enforced and resisted by the multiple actors involved in their production and reproduction. Additionally, we reviewed Brazilian and Rio de Janeiro's environmental legislation, reports produced by the Rio de Janeiro State Institute for Environmental Management (INEA for its acronym in Portuguese) and tourism promotion materials for the region. Semi-structured interviews with the REJ's superintendent (RS), community members (C1, C2, C3), tourism operators from outside (T1) and inside (T2) the community, reflections of community members on social media (SM) and a meeting (IM) about the re-categorisation of the REJ conducted by INEA in Ponta Negra in 29 October 2010 provide the narratives used in this paper to illustrate the different discourses at play.

Coastal people: history and discourses

The rural inhabitants of the Atlantic Forest Coast of Brazil are known as Caiçara, which in Tupi-Guaraní literally translates as "the man from the coast" (Adams 2003, p. 22). This term was originally used to refer to the poles employed for enclosing the rural dwellings or fish traps made with tree branches. Later on, Caiçara referred to beach huts used for storing canoes and fishing equipment. More recently, Caiçara was used to identify people from the coastal areas of the states of Paraná, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Adams 2000).

Those known as Caiçara today are the outcome of a historical miscegenation that has pushed them to the geographic and social margins of Brazilian social and economic history. The Caiçara as a people emerged in the sixteenth century when Portuguese men

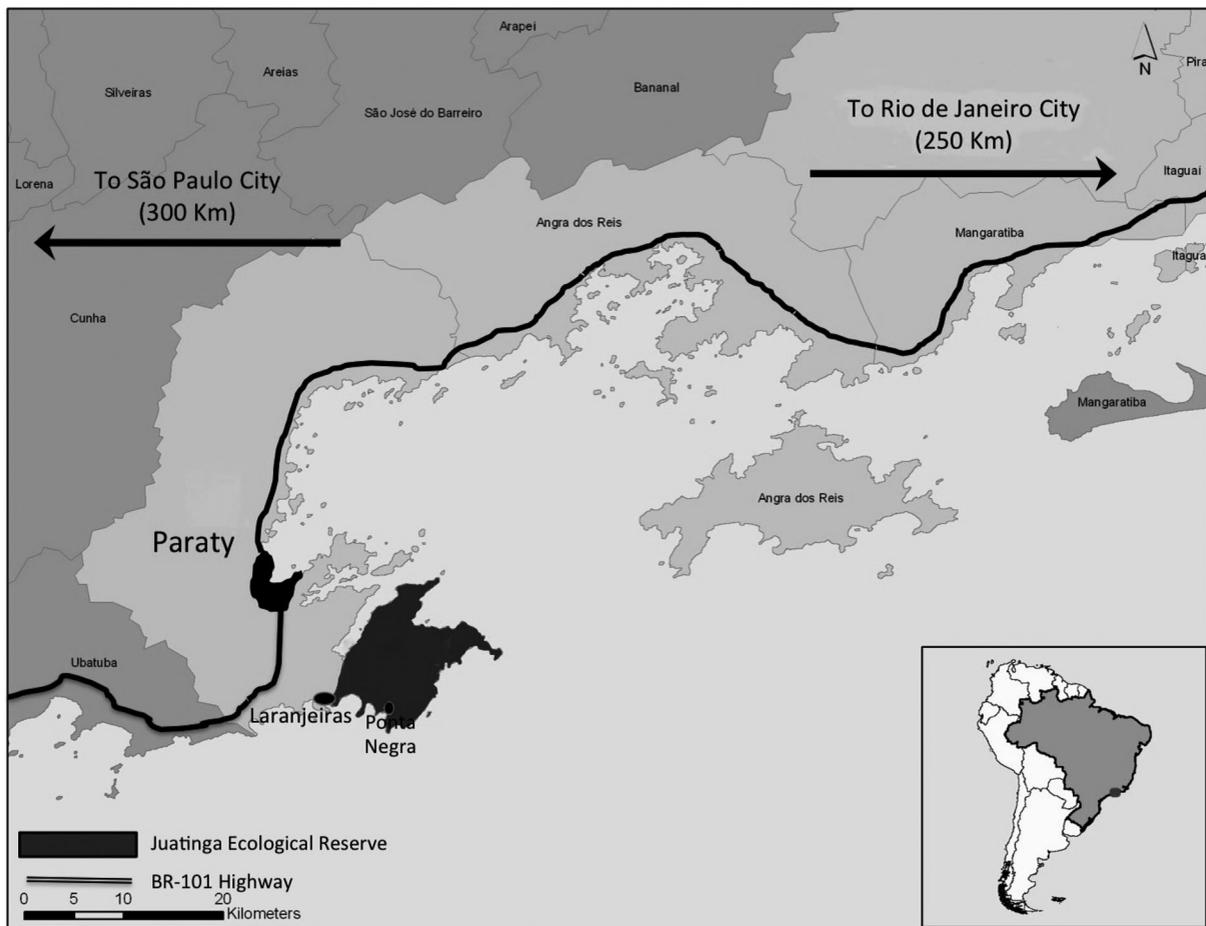


Figure 1. Study community and regional context.
Source : author

took wives of African origin and local Guarani tribes (Dean 1996). The descendants of this process are known as the first Brazilians, or *mamelucos*, marginal people in the Brazilian colonial society who were not recognised as full citizens and had no rights to legal land ownership (Adams 2003). Despite this, they were an important labour force during the regional economic cycles of coffee, sugar cane and gold extraction (Teixeira 2006) as well as suppliers of basic goods from their small land holdings for the owners of the plantations dedicated to producing single commodities (Adams 2003). While Portuguese immigrants used most of the fertile, flat lands along the coast for sugar cane farming, the *mamelucos* occupied rugged lands that garnered no economic interest, such as the Serra do Mar Ridge that runs along the south-eastern coast (Dean 1996).

It is not clear when the term *Caiçara*, people from the coast, gained currency over *mameluco* (Adams 2003). What is clear is that the recent use of this term, *Caiçara*, by academics, media and society in general is connected with profound social and economic changes in the region as well as discourses about what coastal people should do and look like (Adams 2003). Following the bust of the sugarcane economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Atlantic Forest Coast became the refuge for rural people and shifting agriculture and small-scale fishing became their main livelihood. This period also saw the arrival of multiple anthropologists and social scientists who carefully described the local ways of life and harvesting activities (Bernardes 1950, Willems 1952, Mussolini 1980). Bernardes (1950, p. 36) points out that *Caiçara* was what people from São Paulo City called the locals of the Atlantic Forest Coast, a term that prevailed in many of the ethnographies of the time.

The perspectives about those who were known as *Caiçara*, however, differed diametrically. While Bernardes (1950) refers to the *Caiçara* as people living in equilibrium with and dependent on the local environment with little willingness for innovation, Willems (1952) describes them as people with alertness and openness to participate in new economic opportunities and having a strong interest in formal education. Bernardes' description and those similar to hers (e.g. Mussolini 1980) reflect the moment of economic stagnation coastal peoples were living in, but ignore the recent history of this group of people as well as their successes overcoming the busts and taking advantage of the booms of the regional economy (Willems 1952, Begossi 2006). Bernardes' and similar accounts prevailed and facilitated the later labelling by conservationists and regional environmental authorities of the *Caiçara* as traditional populations and linking them to broader ideas about the ecologically noble savage (Adams 2003).

The boom in tourism development that began in the 1970s skyrocketed real estate value, triggered speculation in the region (Teixeira 2006) and threatened the *Caiçara* villages along the Atlantic Forest Coast. Tourism developers took advantage of the lack of legal ownership of the lands the *Caiçara* occupied and tried to take them over by falsifying legal documents, exercising violence or paying stingily for the land (De Francesco 2010). In some cases, tourism developers were successful, but in others, they could not overcome local resistance, as happened in the village of Trindade (Paraty, Rio de Janeiro) during the 1970s (Plante and Breton 2005).

With large-scale tourism development threatening the last remnants of the Atlantic Forest, national and state environmental authorities expedited the establishment of protected areas along the coast in spite of their inability to undertake the studies required by legislation for their demarcation and regulation (Dean 1996, Vianna 2008). The REJ exemplifies the gaps of this process as it was declared in 1992 (Rio de Janeiro 1992) using a category that restricted human inhabitation in spite of the fact that there were fourteen coastal communities with about 2000 people located within its boundaries (Diegues and Nogara

2005). The case of the REJ was not an exception. Similar processes, in which protected areas were created without consultation with local inhabitants and restricted use of natural resource within their boundaries in spite of the existence of resource-dependent communities, are common (e.g. Peixe Lagoon National Park, Almudi and Berkes 2010).

The REJ was one of the first protected areas in Brazil that had the conservation of traditional populations and the promotion of their culture among its objectives (Rio de Janeiro 1992). However, the understanding of these traditional populations by the environmental authority was limited and lacked an adequate baseline regarding the biological and cultural diversity existing in the area (Brito 2003). Additionally, there was no consultation with the affected communities when the REJ was declared. The documentation that supported the declaration of the REJ was based on two fieldtrips and the promise of gathering enough information to create a management plan that would consider the needs and perspectives of the people living in the reserve (Brito 2003). Today, more than 20 years after its declaration, the environmental authority in charge has done little to protect and promote the Caiçara and their culture. Instead, branding Caiçara as traditional and imposing restrictions on their access to natural resources within the reserve boundaries have triggered outmigration (Idrobo and Davidson-Hunt 2012).

For the environmental authority, some academics and the Brazilian public in general, the Caiçara are traditional because they have subsistence economies based on the extraction of natural resources; live in harmony with nature; and, are isolated from mainstream society (Diegues 2004). As traditional populations, they are assumed to have limited technological development and low consumption patterns. Likewise, their livelihoods are expected to depend directly and mostly on natural resources (Bernardes 1950, Diegues 2001). The natural resources associated with this coastal people include those harvested from the sea using small-scale fishing technologies, game and fruit from the forest and the products from shifting agriculture. Academics have only recently recognised wage labour as part of coastal peoples' livelihood portfolios (Hanazaki *et al.* 2013).

Some scholars note the similarities between the traditional population and the Caiçara label with which coastal people have been branded and the ecologically noble savage discourse (e.g. Adams 2003, da Costa 2011). They challenge this popular perception in presenting the inhabitants of the Atlantic Forest Coast as people with a history and capable of articulating their own identity along with future desires and aspirations. In spite of these efforts, the environmental authority and the tourism industry continue to frame them as ahistorical subjects rather than the protagonists in the making of their own history and future.

Ramos' (1998) treatment of the ecologically noble savage in the context of Brazilian indigenism outlines the problem of labelling the Caiçara as traditional. For Ramos, the noble savage discourse mobilises a romantic idea that sees Indigenous Peoples (or traditional populations in this case) as part of nature and hence pure, or as she puts it, "less affected by the evils of the world" (1998, p. 71). They have the burden of keeping that purity rather than becoming fallen angels, spoiled by mainstream society. Being an integral part of nature means that they need to be protected from the modernised sectors of society, including the right to remain within protected areas and to be part of conservation objectives. According to the ecological noble savage discourse, as soon as traditional populations begin to adopt modern lifestyles, they become undeserving of protection: fallen angels. The ecological noble savage discourse puts traditional peoples in a "social limbo between a paradise of purity and a hell of savagery" (Ramos 1998, p. 85), making illegitimate any attempt by individuals to exercise their agency and adapt to the opportunities and hindrances that emerge from the changing environments in which they live. The perception

of the environmental authority regarding the participation of the people from Ponta Negra in the tourism economy, as well as the way by which the tourism industry has represented them, provides testimony to the power of the noble savage trope in their everyday life.

“You are privileged to live here”¹: the Ponta Negra Caiçara in the REJ

In this section, we examine the understanding REJ management authority has of the Ponta Negra inhabitants. The INEA has remained silent in their official publications regarding their perceptions of the traditional populations that inhabit the protected areas they manage. However, documents prepared by their lawyers (Silveira and Brandão 1991) outline the legal dimensions of human inhabitation inside protected areas. Metaphorically, the Caiçara are fallen angels because of their participation in the tourism economy in a way that does not meet the characteristics of traditional populations.

The Brazilian laws that regulate the management of protected areas refer to traditional populations in vague ways. According to the law that governs the Brazilian National System of Nature Conservation Units (SNUC 2000), a traditional population is one that relies on the natural resources found in a given protected area to survive. One of the objectives of this law regarding traditional populations is to: “protect the natural resources necessary for the subsistence of traditional peoples, respecting and valuing their knowledge and culture and promoting them socially and economically”² (SNUC 2000, Article 4, XIII). The law that regulates the permanence of traditional peoples within protected areas in the Rio de Janeiro State (Governo do Rio de Janeiro, Law 2394/1995) shares similar objectives with two criteria to define traditional populations: (1) at least 50 years of permanency within a given protected area and (2) the retention of subsistence economies and direct dependence on the natural ecosystem. The INEA, however, has weighed people’s activities heavier than their historical relation with the land when evaluating their future within a protected area (Silveira and Brandão 1991). This is the case of the REJ and the treatment given to its inhabitants in the context of shifting livelihoods and the increased dependence on the tourism sector.

The relation between the INEA staff and the inhabitants of the REJ has been problematic from its outset. Because of its biological and ecological uniqueness, the RS argues that this reserve requires full protection – that is, without people living inside it:

According to the management system within which the reserve was created, people are not meant to live inside it. Even though this is a reserve with almost 2000 people living inside, it is managed by an internal division of INEA that is responsible for conservation units [Protected Areas] with integral protection. This division works under the premise of paying compensations so people can leave the reserves. We need to define the legal situation of those areas, so there is no insecurity for the people in these areas. (RS)

While the Caiçara permanence and the conservation of their culture were management objectives when the REJ was declared, for the INEA, the stability of the Caiçara within the boundaries of this reserve is interim and depends on the availability of funds to enable their relocation (Silveira and Brandão 1991). Given the lack of funds for such relocation, the INEA staff justified the need for removing people from this protected area based on the cultural and economic change that the REJ’s inhabitants have experienced since the declaration of the reserve. The perception of the RS is that the participation in the tourism industry is transforming the identity of the Caiçara within the reserve. When people who “ancestrally” depended on the natural environment and its resources become reliant on

the tourism, economy, they begin to walk on the path that leads to the loss of their traditional lifestyle and the values that enable their apparently seamless integration with the natural environment. As soon as such transition happens, people cease to be traditional and lose their right to remain in the protected area:

The relationship between traditional populations and the environment is positive when there is the possibility to maintain human progress at bay in order to preserve cultural identity. This in turn ensures the perfect harmony of natural resource use with environmental preservation . . . The relationship between traditional populations and the environment is grounded in respect for the natural cycles of the resources they use. Once that bond ceases to exist, these populations are no longer traditional and should be treated as any other community. (Silveira and Brandão 1991, p. 6–7)

The current INEA staff recognises that these ideas are outdated and that there is a need to include Caiçara's participation in the tourism economy as part of the new reality of the reserve: "Our administrative and technical vision is that it is not possible to kick people out from their territories as we had advocated before" (RS). However, as long as INEA understands the REJ as a protected area that demands integral protection, the presence of the present-day Caiçara remains an undesirable contradiction in their eyes:

We need to adjust the legislative framework of the reserve to the reality of tourism. When the reserve was created, one of its objectives was to protect the traditional populations living inside it. We had few practical means to do that, but that was the objective. The Caiçara we wanted to protect was a Caiçara that used dugout canoes as a main means of transportation and that fished and practiced shifting agriculture. That Caiçara was attuned to our legislative framework. Today, because of the economic cycle within which the Caiçara are inserted [i.e., tourism], they want to build [using industrially-made construction material] and use the land with tourism-oriented infrastructure. That creates conflicts with the mandate of a conservation unit with integral protection. (RS)

The lack of a formal management plan for more than two decades after its declaration, the exponential growth of the tourism industry and the gentrification of some communities within the protected area may hint that the REJ is in fact a "paper park":

There has been really bad communication [between the INEA staff and the communities within the protected area]. There are a lots of people within the reserve who still do not know that they live within a reserve; they do not have adequate information about the implications of living within a reserve, do not know what the benefits are, and do not know what they can and cannot do. We have never been clear in providing such information during our management of that area. (RS)

There is agreement about the negative impact that the reserve and those who manage it have had in the community. A tourism entrepreneur (T1) who works in the community acknowledges the lack of action of the environmental authority in the protected area as well as the many limitations they have imposed on the people living in Ponta Negra:

INEA has done nothing here during the last 30 years. No education, no management plan, nothing. INEA says the reserve exists, but in reality it doesn't. Every time I've heard that INEA officials are coming, local people get scared and run away. People here are really afraid of INEA because they interact through threats, always banning what people do here without giving a clear reason why.

Despite the lack of attention, the INEA staff have been successful in curtailing access to key sites and resources to the people who live in the REJ since this was established via tight control over residents' activities, especially in terms of shifting agriculture and hunting (Idrobo 2014).

Considering that the SNUC did not include the Ecological Reserve (i.e. *Reserva Ecológica*) category at its time of publication in 2000, this forced the INEA to initiate a re-categorisation process (still in progress as of 2015) that has become a forum for steady interaction among INEA staff and REJ inhabitants, including the community members of Ponta Negra. On 29 October 2010, we documented one of those meetings in which the REJ superintendent explained the forthcoming re-categorisation process and expressed that it would be an opportunity to correct the mistakes from the past. In spite of the positive attitude, he criticised the way tourism has grown in the community. The boom of uncontrolled housing construction in Ponta Negra is an example of the conflicting relations existing between INEA staff and Ponta Negra residents. The RS considered that holiday homes owned by outsiders, houses used exclusively as holiday rentals and the recent renovations done to the local restaurants breach the expectations of what Caiçara should do within the reserve; yet, he ignored the contribution of tourism and housing construction to the livelihood portfolios of many households:

The Caiçara should be able to build new houses as long as they are used for dwelling purposes. That is, housing meant to satisfy survival needs for the families. At the same time, we prohibit construction that does not belong to locals and that is meant to cater services for tourists. (RS, IM)

This discourse is enacted through regulations that require construction licences for new homes or for renovating already existing ones, controlling the amount of construction materials brought into the community and dismantling buildings used for tourism purposes. The INEA staff has put in place several controls on the people living in the community so they can only bring construction material in under a specific construction licence that requires a lengthy bureaucratic process involving several visits of INEA staff to the community.

Control of tourism activities and infrastructure has become more aggressive in the recent years. In early 2012, the INEA required a community member from Ponta Negra to dismantle a group of small chalets within the community boundaries built for tourist use. Since INEA is known to use explosives to control illegal constructions in the area (INEA 2010), this community member had no choice other than to dismantle the buildings in order to not lose the construction materials. In October 2012, in the middle of the so-called participatory re-categorisation process, the INEA launched an environmental police unit (*Unidade de Polícia Ambiental*) with 22 armed guards in charge of controlling environmental crimes in the REJ, which include illegal hunting and housing construction within this protected area (INEA 2012).

INEA also enacts the ecologically noble savage discourse in subtle ways. In spite of the problems, the declaration of the reserve brought to the local communities and the failure to accomplish the proposed management objectives, INEA constantly reminds community members that they are the stewards of a land in which they do not have the right to live: "to live here is a privilege you have" (RS, IM). To ensure that the Caiçara continue to live in "harmony with nature", INEA expects them to sacrifice their desires and aspirations to ensure the quality of life of the Brazilian citizenry: "The Juatinga Reserve is important for the quality of life of us all" (RS, IM).

INEA is also aware of the ways by which they have affected the livelihoods of the inhabitants of the reserve by limiting a number of traditional activities. Community members have been discouraged from remaining within the REJ through impediments and pressures that make life harder than it should be. The contradictions are obvious even for the reserve's superintendent:

The environmental authority created the reserve and with it some mechanisms to protect the people living within it. However, it also constrained traditional activities, such as cutting forest after it has reached certain height to open new shifting agriculture plots. This kind of management has affected the normal cycles around itinerant agriculture. Also, cutting a tree big enough to make a dugout canoe became an environmental crime. These are examples in which the environmental legislation has curtailed Caiçara's traditional activities. The reserve has protected the region from the big tourism developments, but at the same time it has hindered the practice of a lot of traditional activities. (RS)

Caiçara and tourism: looking for ecologically noble savages?

Participation in the booming tourism economy has not helped coastal peoples to shed the traditional veil with which many anthropologists and the environmental authority have shrouded them in over recent decades. Instead, using the Caiçara trope, the tourism industry has portrayed the rural inhabitants of the Atlantic Forest Coast as exotic, timeless people who can offer those coming from fast-paced urban centres an opportunity to experience the past and a sustainable way of living. Manifestations of the use of the ecologically noble savage discourse can be seen throughout tourism advertisement of the Atlantic Forest Coast. As examples of these discursive elements, we examined a set of coffee table books, magazines, tourism booklets and websites.

Materials developed for tourist consumption that involve the Caiçara have perpetuated their image as ecologically noble savages. Coffee table books such as “Vida Caiçara” (Caiçara Life; Alves 2007) or “Dias de Caiçara” (Caiçara Days; Pascalicchio and D’Alessi 2006) are easy to find in the lobbies of luxury hotels, restaurants and tourist agencies in Paraty’s colonial downtown. With their eye-catching photos, romantic narratives and matte finishing, they portray the Caiçara as people living in harmony with nature:

The Caiçara makes no distinction between man [sic] and nature: [he] lives accordingly, as part of the whole, and faces the uncertainties and dangers from the land and the sea on equal terms. His creativity supplies him with techniques and simple tools and he follows the path of understanding and harmony.³ (Alves 2007, p. 108)

Similar to what is found in other coffee table books, this narrative brands the Caiçara within an idyllic and timeless notion as people who were born by the beach, grew up playing on white sand dunes and hunting in the forest; people who fish by following the phases of the moon and who can predict the weather only by dipping their toes in the water (Alves 2007, p. 5). This lens locks the Caiçara back into the time of the stagnant economy that followed the bust of the sugar cane commodity market, ignoring their active involvement in other commodity markets as well as the changes in the economy and in the local livelihoods that have happened since that time. Remaining stagnant is often equated by the tourism industry as the path to sustainability. The authors of these coffee table books may argue that the books themselves are attempts to maintain the Caiçara culture alive, but the simple fact that each one of these books costs no less than \$50 USD means that the final owners and beneficiaries of these books will not be those who are portrayed in them.

Isolation, timelessness and sustainability are recurrent themes in the discourse the tourism industry casts upon the Caiçara. Examples of this can be found in the magazines that showcase the Atlantic Forest Coast as well as in the multiple websites that advertise “eco-cultural tourism” products. Ponta Negra was featured in *Paraty em Revista* (Elage 2011), a magazine that promotes touristic attractions in the Paraty municipality. In spite of acknowledging that life in the community has adapted to the changing regional economy, what is really important about Ponta Negra is that it provides peace and isolation to its visitors, who are able to ignore such changes: “Even with these vast changes in their lifestyle, little can be noticed by the eyes of those coming from bigger cities for a few days in search of peace and isolation” (Elage 2011, p. 29).

Similarly, tourism entrepreneurs who offer tourist packages in Ponta Negra on the Internet use a comparable discourse related to isolation, timelessness and sustainability. The geographic isolation in which the people of the community live has contributed positively to visiting a place “out of our time”.⁴ Among the objectives of these entrepreneurs is to turn tourism development into a sustainable enterprise by bringing together “new ideas of ecotourism” with old concepts of “subsistence”. For example, one of the strategies by which this objective is touted to be reached is by turning the “traditional Caiçara architecture” into “an object of desire” for both the public in general and the community itself.⁵ Even though houses made with wattle and daub and with thatched roofs are recognised by some as traditional (e.g. Adams 2000), this type of construction has been progressively abandoned as people have found the means to replace the traditional materials with brick and tile, which they consider to be more comfortable and hygienic (Idrobo and Davidson-Hunt 2012).

These examples portray the Caiçara as people living in harmony with nature and whose culture belongs to a timeless “living museum”. The discourse from the tourism industry takes for granted that the Caiçara way of life offers important lessons for biodiversity conservation and achieving sustainability that have to be protected as Brazilian heritage. However, it also becomes disempowering as it reinforces the image of the Caiçara as backward, rural people with little willingness for innovation or need for change. Initiatives, such as the Caiçara Manual for Community-Based Ecotourism (Instituto Ecobrasil No date), portray the Caiçara as providers of basic services, that is, as fishers, boat drivers, waiters and waitresses and maids, and without major participation in the marketing of tourism packages in terms of their design and promotion. While the hindrances for the Caiçara to participate in higher levels of the tourism chain are structural, including the lack of basic education and training in the sector, the aforementioned manual does little to promote local initiatives and organisation. Instead, it favours the continuation of the current power structures that turn the Caiçara into objects that are part of the landscapes and resources they seem to have conserved, rather than dynamic agents of change.

What people in Ponta Negra say and do

The people in Ponta Negra have not remained passive to the ecological noble savage trope that the environmental legislation and the tourism industry have cast upon them. Their reactions can be found in their response to the INEA’s regulations and the ways by which tourism has grown in the community. Although in some nearby communities the response has been collective (e.g. Trindade; Plante and Breton 2005), Ponta Negra’s case shows us how individual creativity has been a locus of everyday resistance.

People from the community consider the regulations on shifting agriculture, hunting and tourism activities contradictory. On the one hand, the so-called traditional practices have been restricted via fear-based controls.

The INEA does not like us to hunt. The old people used to hunt a lot, but now we cannot. If the people from INEA catch you in the forest hunting they can seize your weapon and your game and send you to jail. Hunting is a crime. (C1)

On the other hand, the demands of INEA regarding limiting tourism activities do not match with the way tourism currently operates in Ponta Negra. If INEA's vision of tourism were enacted, local livelihoods would shrink to fish trade and consumption; a dwindling shifting agriculture and the current infrastructure for tourism would be left unused:

If we can make a better and more sustained living out of tourism, we will not need to be hunting in the forest or cutting down the forest. That is what I think, but people from INEA only want to put limitations to our lives, without giving us new alternatives. But if we have no other ways to make a livelihood, what can we do? (C2)

Some community members are even more analytical about the mismatch between current legislation and the social and economic changes Ponta Negra has undergone in the last decades. These changes have provoked people to have a different understanding of who they are in relation to the ecologically noble savage trope used to characterise them. In the aftermath of the October 29 meeting, a community member said that the environmental authority is designing regulations for the Caiçara that inhabited the area 50 or 60 years ago, not for the current Caiçara:

The INEA thinks that we live in the past, the way our parents lived. They want us to live in harmony with nature, but I need the income I make from the houses I rent to pay for my children's university. (C3)

Although little organisation at the community level has taken place in Ponta Negra, there are remarkable individuals that defy and resist the impositions and limitations that come along with the Caiçara discourse. In spite of the restrictions and the fear-based management from INEA, tourism has become an important economic sector in Ponta Negra that is allowing locals to adapt to the restrictions to land-based harvesting activities and the changes in the regional economy. A tourism entrepreneur (T2) from Ponta Negra recognises the key role that tourism plays in the current community livelihoods, as it provides an alternative source of income. This income ripples throughout the community, discouraging outmigration and encouraging the retention of natural resource harvesting activities:

The most important feature of tourism is the income it generates. If there were no tourism, I think many people would have left the community. Tourism allows people to stay here and keeps the traditional practices going. Tourists come to experience the local culture. So, if you have something to show, that translates into income: fishing and agriculture are key for that.

In Ponta Negra, tourism-related activities feature as the primary economic sector for 25.63% of the households in the community and provide secondary income to another 51.11%. Likewise, 24 out of the 45 inhabitable dwellings owned by people from the community are available for short-term rent (Idrobo 2014). There are also three restaurants, two of which are opened year-round during the weekend. Also associated with tourism, housing construction is another main livelihood activity for 10.26% of the households. But the relevance of tourism goes beyond its contributions to income. Participation in tourism has enticed creativity and innovation among people in Ponta Negra who have brought and

adapted their local knowledge into the new settings created by this booming industry. This is the case of two local families of entrepreneurs who have been able to tap into this emergent industry by creating businesses that provide competitive services that draw in clients from around the world. They show how the so-called traditional peoples can be creative agents and are able to thrive in a new economic sector. We draw on the life history of one of those entrepreneurs (T2) and his business to illustrate our case.

The story of T2's tourism business begins in the mid-1990s, but the circumstances that allowed him to get involved in this sector can be traced to when he left the community to receive formal education. T2 moved to Paraty to study high school as soon as he finished the formal schooling available in the community. Living in Paraty gave T2 exposure to multiple jobs and activities, including some in the tourism industry, that changed his perception of Ponta Negra and its potentials:

I took barman lessons in Paraty, worked at the “*Pousada do Ouro*” hotel as a valet and at the Bank. Working at that hotel as well as at the bank I learned how to interact with clients. I use all those skills in my work here in Ponta Negra. All that experience outside Ponta Negra helped me a lot to understand the value of local resources. (T2)

T2's participation in tourism in Ponta Negra started in the early 1990s through the offering of basic lodging and homemade food to the few incoming tourists. This soon grew as he opened a restaurant and began to actively bring in tourists and provide additional lodging services. Working in Paraty allowed T2 to save money and become eligible for loans so that he could invest in his assets back in Ponta Negra. He not only improved the infrastructure for lodging. Provision of traditional foods and implementation of marketing strategies have been key to the expansion and success of his business. Word-of-mouth marketing, partnerships with 10 national tourism agencies and a French agency, and 2 websites manage to attract and keep a flow of tourists throughout the year. He has also articulated his business portfolio into several tourism packages that offer hiking trips along the REJ. The knowledge that T2 has of the Ponta Negra environment also plays a role in his business. He knows the area and what activities, places and resources might be of interest to the people he brings to the community. Fishing, shifting agriculture, beaches, waterfalls and local foods are important components of his brochure. He sees this dimension of his business as common sense: “As a local you do not need to take courses to show the place to the tourists. You just need to bring the tourist and show them around” (T2). T2's business model has changed the way tourism is conducted in Ponta Negra and many people in the community see him as a model to imitate.

Discussion and conclusion

Using an anti-essentialist political ecology lens (Escobar 2008) to analyse how the ecologically noble savage trope has been deployed over the coastal inhabitants of the Atlantic Forest Coast, this paper has showcased how environmental discourses construct natures that shape use and access to natural resources. We examine the tensions between two regimes of nature in which the Caiçara are blamed for becoming modern and contributing to the destruction of the Atlantic Forest Coast by some and, at the same time, are romanticised as noble savages by others. Each discourse carries forward an understanding of rural coastal peoples and their relation with the environment that structures and dictates what people should and should not be and do, now and in the future, in terms of environmental regulation and participation in economic activities. Both discourses also eclipse local voices

and efforts of local peoples in their attempts to re-assert their identity without undermining their goals and desires as they adapt to how the world in which they live changes. Making explicit these environmental discourses and their interactions brings valuable theoretical insights in understanding the processes underlying changing use and access to natural resources of small-scale societies.

Caiçara and traditional populations are labels employed by the Brazilian government and society to give a position and a role to coastal people. Caiçara, a derogatory term equivalent to coastal rural person, was branded upon coastal peoples and has been used as a foundation to conceptualise them as either fallen angels or noble savages. This conceptualisation of the Caiçara has been a forum of intense debate between two main schools of Brazilian scholarship: preservationists and conservationists (De Castro *et al.* 2006). Preservationists see the permanence of rural populations in the Atlantic Forest as illegitimate and incompatible with conservation goals (Galetti 2001, Galetti *et al.* 2009). Conservationists see rural populations as allies of biodiversity conservation, given their supposedly harmonic relation with the local environment and the low impact of their natural resource harvesting activities (Viana 1999). Beyond academia, preservationist ideas that enact the fallen angel discourse have gained traction in the environmental legislation and the official management of protected areas. Meanwhile, conservationist ideas have been appropriated by the tourism industry to incorporate the Caiçara as part of ecotourism packages.

Even though, according to the environmental authority, tourism is the evil that spoiled the Caiçara's traditional essence, the tourism industry has been able to produce an ecologically noble Caiçara in a more pure form. Through the veil of "living in harmony with nature", the tourism economy has managed to make the tourist overlook aspects of material poverty that coastal people themselves identify as necessities, such as electricity and adequate quality education in Ponta Negra. This industry sells the Caiçara as a product that invites tourists to experience peoples and places from another time: as an exotic, sensualised and naturalised "other". This Caiçara fits a discourse of environmental crisis in which Indigenous peoples represent the path to sustainability through living in harmony with nature (Ulloa 2005).

Either as fallen angels or as ecologically noble savages, the idea of the Caiçara is perpetuated by the environmental authority and the tourism industry. They have shaped the category of Caiçara by normalising a set of attitudes and dispositions within the people of the region themselves through their control of the regulatory environment and the representation of the Caiçara to the outside world. In academic contexts, the study of the Caiçara's knowledge demonstrates their vast understanding of the local environment through the compendiums of local names of species that they access from a diversity of ecosystems. The knowledge of the Caiçara is still seen important for the conservation of biodiversity and to find the paths to sustainable local livelihoods (Borges and Peixoto 2009, Hanazaki *et al.* 2009). Yet, at the same time, the desires and aspirations of the Caiçara, such as better access to education, are identified as the cause of the erosion of the knowledge of and changing relations with the local environment (Sousa *et al.* 2012).

In spite of how ingrained these discourses are, critical analyses about deconstructing the ecologically noble savage trope in the Caiçara context are emerging (Adams 2003, De Francesco 2010, da Costa 2011). These perspectives bring forth historical perspectives to understand the Caiçara as dynamic agents of the Atlantic Forest Coast. Adams (2003), for example, applies the concept of ethnogenesis, to develop a critical historical analysis of the Caiçara. By providing a perspective that takes into consideration how political struggles and their historical consciousness shape culture, ethnogenesis presents the Caiçara beyond static categories. De Francesco (2010), in fact, presents how Caiçara communities within

the REJ are giving new meaning to their so-called traditional identity by asserting their historical right to stay and hence defend their territory.

This paper showcases how, by virtue of having historically been identified under the Caiçara label, Ponta Negra people find themselves as profiles on a Janus coin minted by others. Denied the opportunity to be subjects constructing a nature of their own, they are positioned as objects of competing discourses, whose proponents have the power and ability to shape Caiçara natures in environmental legislation and through marketing discourse. On the one hand, the environmental authority has identified them as fallen angels whose lifestyle is not sustainable anymore. This has allowed the removal of access to key harvesting sites and historical natural resource harvesting activities from local livelihoods. On the other hand, the tourism industry has perpetuated the Caiçara as an ideal that fits the ecologically noble savage trope and benefited from the isolation and material poverty in which many Ponta Negra people live to sell them as part of packages that invite costumers to travel back in time. As a group, Ponta Negra people have become objects of these discourses through a lack of collective rights and thus a weak position to negotiate for their own desires and aspirations related to their identity and livelihoods. However, innovative individuals have been able to break such stereotypes imposed over them by designing thriving businesses that articulate concepts of Caiçara identity from within their connection to place as well as their adaptability to changing environments.

Using an anti-essentialist political ecology lens provides a critical perspective on the ecological noble savage discourse that invites us to consider Indigenous and rural peoples and their knowledge from their own perspectives. This lens also allows us understanding how discourses set schemes of perception and action that both essentialise subjects and deny them the exercise of their agency, basic rights and access to resources and sites key to their livelihoods and well-being (Escobar 1999b, 2008, West *et al.* 2006). In the case of the Caiçara, it is necessary to throw away the Janus coin that looks to the past and sees ecologically noble savages and a future that envisions fallen angels. Rather, Caiçara should be given the opportunity to be subjects of their own history and territory and dynamic agents with desires and aspirations for a future. It is only through clear rights that they will again be able to weave together forest, coast and sea into an identity of their own making instead of being stranded on the shores of others' imaginaries of the Caiçara.

The understanding of Caiçara as a social construction has percolated into the everyday life of the people in Ponta Negra. Proof of this is a joke told on SM by a friend from this community in which he reflects on the constructedness of this term:

- The reporter asks: What defines being a Caiçara?
- The Caiçara answers: Wait a minute, let me Google it . . . LOL! (SM)⁶

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Notes

1. This is a phrase used by the REJ superintendent during a meeting conducted in Ponta Negra (IM).
2. Original text in Portuguese: *Proteger os recursos naturais necessários à subsistência de populações tradicionais, respeitando e valorizando seu conhecimento e sua cultura e promovendo-as social e economicamente.*
3. *O Caiçara não faz distinção entre homem e natureza: vive de acordo, como parte de todo, e enfrenta as incertezas e perigos do mar e da terra em condições de igualdade. Se abastece de técnicas e ferramentas simples que inventou ou adquiriu e segue pelo caminho de entendimento e da harmonia.*
4. *O isolamento geográfico do local e da comunidade atuam positivamente para que visitemos um lugar fora do nosso tempo.* (Vila Iandé website; Available from: <http://www.vilaiande.com.br/br/conceito/index.html> [accessed 3 December 2012]).
5. *Elevar a “arquitetura caiçara” a condição de objeto de desejo do público em geral, assim como na percepção da própria comunidade.* (Vila Iandé website; Available from: <http://www.vilaiande.com.br/br/conceito/index.html> [accessed 3 December 2012]).
6. *O reporter pergunta: O q[sic] define ser um caiçara? O caiçara responde: Espera aí um pouquinho, vou pesquisar no google ... kkkk.*

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