

INTRODUCTION

THE CREATION of protected areas¹ has been one of the principal elements in strategies for the conservation of nature, in particular in the countries of the Third World. The establishment of these areas increased substantially in the 1970's and 1980's, when around 2,098 federal protected areas were created in the entire world, encompassing more than 3,100,000 km². Today, around 5% of the surface of the earth is legally protected, through 20,000 different categories, covering an area the size of Canada, spread throughout 130 countries including not only the federal level but also provincial, state, municipal levels. (World Conservation Centre, 1996).

In 1990 Brazil had about 34 national parks, 23 biological reserves, 21 ecological stations, 38 national forests, 14 environmentally protected areas, and 4 extractive reserves, totalling 31,294,911 ha or almost 4% of the territory (CIMA, 1991). Around 28,302,572 ha of this area are located in the Amazon region, with the remaining 1,125,883 ha being from other regions.

¹ In this book, the term 'protected areas' refers to all categories of areas from which human populations are excluded. In Brazil this includes mainly national and state parks, ecological stations and biological reserves. However, in the text, the terms parks, reserves, protected natural areas, natural reserves, conservation reserves are also used to refer to protected areas as defined above.

A combination of factors could explain this increased interest in creating protected areas in Brazil: the rapid devastation of the Amazonian rainforests and the Mata Atlantica; the loss of biodiversity; the availability of international funding for conservation efforts; the possibility of revenue generation from tourism in parks; and above all the pressure on the World Bank to create new protected areas to counterbalance traditional development projects in fragile areas such as the Amazon.

In this context, the establishment of protected areas also becomes an important political weapon for the dominant elites of many countries of the Third World, who can continue to obtain external financing for large projects, which will have a significant impact on fragile ecosystems.

Brazil currently has about 4% of its territory established as protected natural areas under federal jurisdiction, an area already larger than many European countries. If the proposal of UNEP that approximately 10% of national territory be put under some form of protection is achieved, around 800,000 km² of Brazilian territory would be parks and reserves, a surface area equivalent to France and Germany combined. In this context, it is important to note that today about 18% of the Amazonian region is protected (including indigenous reserves).

Apparently, most environmental agencies maintain that the greater the area that is put under some form of protection, the better it is for conservation (Ehrlich, 1982). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) proposed that ideally around 10% of the land surface should be turned into conservation areas (UNEP, 1989:91).

This proportion has in fact already been achieved in about 7 countries in Asia, 14 countries in Africa, and 6 countries in Latin America (Ghimire, 1991). It is interesting that the U.S.A., one of the proponents of this idea, has protected some 10.5% of the landscape in all categories of protected areas and less than 2% of their territory as national parks (Parks Guide, 1989:23), and Europe has less than 7%. Apparently the idea of national parks is important for the Third World, but not for the industrialized countries. This, despite the fact that many Third World countries

are going through crises of food shortages, resulting in part from a shortage of land for agriculture and from an unequal land distribution. The World Conservation Strategy of the International Union for Conservation of Nature — IUCN (1980) proposed that agricultural land in poor countries should be reserved for agriculture, but with the exception of Indonesia and Ethiopia, none have significantly expanded the programs for resettlement or rural development for their landless farmers .

Also, governments have not correctly valued the environmental and social costs of expanding national parks and other protected areas. In many cases the expulsion of inhabitants from the areas transformed into national parks has resulted in over-use of the protected areas by the former inhabitants, who are often resettled in inadequate conditions in the proximity of these conservation areas. In other cases, such as Vale do Ribeira in São Paulo State, almost the entire area of many municipal districts has been turned into parks and reserves, without consulting the local populations or authorities. These affected people then complained about the lack of possibilities for economic expansion, and obstacles to the creation of new jobs caused by the existence of large protected areas in their regions. This has frequently set the population of these municipal districts against the existence of protected areas, which are considered to be the cause of the economic difficulties faced by the districts.

In Brazil, one of the most crucial issues concerning protected areas relates to the social and ethnic problems caused by the expulsion of traditional populations, whether indigenous or not, from their ancestral territories and by the constraints posed by imposition of those areas on the livelihood of people living inside and in the buffer zones of national parks. The indigenous populations have been estimated by the United Nations at 300 million, primarily in 70 countries, and throughout various ecosystems, ranging from savannah, forests and polar regions. According to McNeely (1993), the people known as 'tribals, natives, traditionals or of different cultural minorities' that live in isolated regions, occupy about 19% of the land surface, living in fragile ecosystems. Currently it is most often these ecosystems that are

considered 'natural' which are transformed into protected natural areas, involving the expulsion of the residents. With this authoritarian action, for the benefit of urban populations, the state contributes to the loss of a wide range of ethno-knowledge and ethnoscience, of ingenious systems for managing natural resources, and of cultural diversity itself.

The expulsion of inhabitants has contributed to even more degradation of areas of park that, because of a lack of monitoring, are invaded by logging industries and miners who illegally exploit the natural resources. The inhabitants also illegally extract their means of subsistence in these protected areas, considered as 'lost resources' by the local community.

Governments almost never assess the impact of the creation of parks on the way of life of local inhabitants, who often have been responsible for the preservation of these natural areas. In many Third World countries, populations have been removed from areas that became parks, thereby losing their material and cultural basis for subsistence, without the state bothering to resettle them in an appropriate manner. Traditional populations are transferred from the regions where their ancestors lived, to regions that are ecologically and culturally different. For these populations, the establishment of national parks means greater restrictions in the use of the natural resources that enable them to survive. The groups of hunters, fishermen, and resource users that have developed a symbiosis with the forests, rivers and coastal areas, once relocated to other areas, have great difficulty surviving due to the prohibition of their traditional activities that accompany the creation of the parks (Ghimire, 1991).

For these populations, it is incomprehensible that their traditional activities, primarily connected with subsistence agriculture, fishing, and resource extraction, are considered prejudicial to nature when hotels and tourist infrastructure are permitted for the use of people from outside the area. Paradoxically, most budgets of conservation areas are used for monitoring and enforcement (most of the G7 loans for the Amazon are destined for this end) and much less for improving living conditions and maintenance of the traditional population that, if appropriately

organized and encouraged, could make a positive contribution to the conservation of protected areas.

One problem is that the authorities responsible for the conservation areas perceive the traditional populations as destroyers of wildlife, which eliminates any real opportunities for their incorporation in the conservation project. In many cases, and especially in the Amazon, the so-called 'participation' of traditional populations in the establishment of parks and reserves does not go beyond well-intentioned words, given in order to respond to international demands, especially from the large international institutions such as the World Bank, the IUCN and the World Wildlife Fund — WWF, that consider the involvement of these populations as a positive factor for the success of the undertaking.

In reality, the populations that are still found in parks or that were resettled in the outskirts of parks have not always been seen by the authorities in a positive light. When these associations become more demanding and more organized, defending their historical rights to continue living in the areas where their ancestors lived, they are accused of being against conservation. In most cases 'traditional populations' are isolated, living in ecosystems considered until now to be marginal (mangroves, salt marshes, tropical forests), are illiterate and lacking in political power, and also do not have legal ownership of the land. These facts, very common in the Third World, make expropriation very easy, without the need for giving real compensation for land that they have been inhabited for generations. The large landowners, who have often obtained their land by usurping the rights of the traditional residents, nevertheless can show legal ownership and are royally compensated for the expropriation, as has occurred in many places with the creation of parks and reserves in the Mata Atlântica (Atlantic Rainforest) in Brazil.

The methods of incorporating traditional inhabitants in the planning and creation of conservation areas are in most cases aimed only at minimizing the potential or existing conflicts and do not offer viable alternative livelihoods for the populations that live in the parks. When the presence of these populations is 'tolerated', the limitations on the traditional use of natural

resources are such that inhabitants who do not have other alternatives will migrate 'voluntarily', increasing unemployment and the population of slums in urban areas.

From a theoretical point of view, protected natural areas, especially those involving restricted use (parks, ecological stations, etc.) in their conception and implementation and calling for the resettlement of human populations – including populations that have long lived in the areas considered 'natural' and 'wild' – constitute an ideal location to analyse the relations between humans and nature in the modern world. This situation presents the opportunity to analyze how myths appear in modern societies, and their relation to other existing myths and symbols about the natural world.

The idea of protected areas was conceived in the last century, primarily in the U.S.A., in order to protect wilderness which, according to the advocates of its protection, was threatened by urban-industrial civilization, which is inherently destructive of nature. A related but secondary idea is that, even if the biosphere becomes totally transformed and domesticated by humans, pieces of the 'natural world' can be preserved in their pristine state, as they existed prior to human intervention. However, in addition to the creation of a physical space also exists a particular conception of human-nature relations, characteristic of a type of naturalism that Moscovici (1974) calls *reactive naturalism*, which is equivalent to preservationism and is a reaction against the dominant current of anthropocentric culturalism.

For the *reactive naturalism school* that characterized the nature protection of the last century, as with today's radical environmentalists of the deep ecology school, the only way to protect nature was to isolate it from humans, through the creation of islands of preserved nature which could be admired and revered. These paradisaical places would also serve as wild areas where humans could regain their energies that were drained by the stresses of the cities and the monotony of work. This appears to reproduce the myth of paradise lost – the place longed for and sought by humans after their expulsion from Eden. This neo-myth, or the modern conservationist myth about parks and reserves, is still today

composed not only of old images such as that of a wild paradise and place of contemplation, but also of scientific aims such as the need to protect biodiversity and ecosystem equilibrium. As Morin (1986) argues, technical-rational thinking can be seen as parasitical on mythical and symbolic thought.

The existence of a wild natural world, untouched and untouchable, is an integral part of this neo-myth. As Ellen (1989) argues, however, nature in a pristine state does not exist, and 'natural areas' identified by biogeographers are usually areas extensively transformed by the hands of humans.

The general purpose of these natural areas is to protect and preserve spaces with important ecological attributes. Some of these areas, especially those with parks, are established for their natural richness (today called biodiversity) and aesthetic value, and for the appreciation of visitors, whilst at the same time do not permit people to live in them.

This modern myth, however, was transposed from the United States to the countries of the Third World, including Brazil, that have a distinct ecological, social and cultural reality. In these countries often in the apparently empty tropical forests, live populations of indigenous people and others who make their living from rivers, forests and grasslands. They are bearers of another culture (which will be called here 'traditional') with their own myths and relations with the natural world which are distinct from that which exists in urban-industrial societies. The current Brazilian legislation that creates parks and reserves presupposes, along with the U.S.A., the relocation of the residents of these areas, causing a series of ethical, social, economic, political and cultural problems.

Brazil contains a great variety of ways of life and cultures that can be considered 'traditional'. This great diversity of tribes and indigenous peoples includes more than two hundred different languages. Although the Indian tribes are included in the category of 'traditional populations', they are not the object of this study. A large part of the indigenous population live on reserves, with their own legislation different from that which governs nature conservation areas. However, some scattered indigenous groups today live inside or on the periphery of conservation areas.

The non-indigenous populations and traditional cultures are generally considered peasants and small-scale fishermen, and are the product of intense racial (ethnic) mixing between the white colonizers, the Portuguese, the indigenous population and the African slaves brought by the colonizers. They include the *caiçaras* that inhabit the coast of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Paraná; the *caipiras* (peasants) from the southern states; the *vargeiros* who live on the riverbanks and river floodplains of the North and Northeast; the *jangadeiros* (raft fishermen of the Northeast) the *pantaneiros* or communities and riverine populations of the Pantanal Matogrossense; and the *açoreanos* (small producers of the Santa Catarina coast of Azorean origin). These populations of small producers were formed in the colonial period, frequently between the cycles of economic expansion, that were based on export-oriented monocultures (sugar cane, coffee plantations). With relative isolation, these populations developed distinct ways of life that depend to a great extent on natural cycles, a profound knowledge of biological cycles and natural resources, inherited technologies, symbolism, myths and specific language, with accents and many words of African and indigenous origin. This great cultural diversity, however, has not been adequately studied by ethnographers and anthropologists, as until recently, major preoccupation of anthropologists has been the study of indigenous peoples. This author, in spite of the criticism for the use of the concept of 'cultural area', was one of the first to call attention to the need to study the non-indigenous Brazilian cultures.

Manuel Diegues Jr. (1960) tried to show, from the point of view of the cultural areas, the great diversity of cultures and ways of life in many Brazilian regions (the Northeast agricultural coastal areas, the Northeast Mediterranean, the Amazon, the mining regions of the Plateau, the Centre-west, the Extreme South, the foreign colonization areas, the coffee zone, and the industrial zone).

This diversity of culture and ways of life is evident, for example, in Brazilian coastal regions, and probably has its origins in the relative isolation of the local populations, after the detour of the great economic cycles towards the interior. However, 'small-scale

production' existed before this detour, in the interstices of the colonial monoculture.

Human populations often returned to small-scale production when the economic cycle of regional exports was exhausted, as Mourão (1971) cited in the case of the caiçaras populations of the south coast of São Paulo state. Populations frequently settled in ecosystems that were inadequate for the establishment of export-oriented monocultures, as in the case of the traditional cultures that developed in the mountainous regions and floodplains of the Mata Atlantica, in the riverine regions of the Amazon and the Pantanal, and in the sandy strips of the Northeast coast.

It is exactly these coastal areas of humid tropical forest inhabited by traditional populations that have been converted into the protected natural areas since the 1930's in Brazil.

These areas were mostly ecologically well-preserved because of the way of life of these cultures and they were definitely not uninhabited.