

We are the exotic species: an inquiry into ecotourism on Ilha Grande

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the impact of the recent arrival of tourism on Ilha Grande (an island close to Angra dos Reis, Rio de Janeiro), especially for the community of Abraão village after the location was suddenly transformed into a tourist hot spot. Studies of similar cases provide a model of the consequences of introducing tourist activities in previously untouched places like Abraão village. The antagonism between ‘natives’ and ‘non-natives’ in this village has become a polarized issue following the growth in tourism, preventing widespread acceptance of a green agenda or more generic proposals for ‘an ideal form of tourist development.’

Keywords: ecology, environment, Ilha Grande, tourism.

Introduction

Anyone consulting the literature on what has now become the disciplinary field of ‘tourism studies’ is immediately struck by the contrast between a body of theory filled with generalizations and propositions, and the actual contents of the studied cases, revealing the many incongruences involved in real-life situations. For example, at a theoretical level we find declarations such as:

‘Eco-friendly’ and ‘nature-friendly’ tourism, personalized and pursued in small groups of people, will tend to define the tourist flows of the future. Selected activities undertaken in qualitatively structured facilities – both in terms of the services provided and their architecture and size – are the likely future of tourist movements in the next millennium. (Ruschmann 2001:17).

Viewed from this broad perspective, ‘tourism’ amounts to an entity with its own forms and patterns. Authors describe a macro-context of dominant trends and generic proposals such as the ‘sustainable planning of tourism,’ ‘controlling load capacity,’ and ‘mass tourism’ – descriptions that function as evaluations/observations and

prescriptions/proposals at one and the same time. At a more focused level, though, we find many case studies that show considerable problems in implementing such proposals and the incompatibilities between the ideal and the practical, whether assessed in terms of the visiting tourists or their local hosts.

The comments and recommendations made from a broad perspective are based on previously observed situations, aiming to avoiding the negative aspects of the latter. Krippendorf's recipe (1977:86-146, quoted in Ruschmann 2001:70), for instance, sets out a list of "23 suggestions that, if applied in full, will lead to an ideal form of tourist development." The list makes clear which problems are to be avoided. However, in shifting back from theory to practice and migrating from evaluative studies to concrete proposals for intervening in different contexts, these kinds of recommendations are equivalent to planning proposals that have passed their sell-by date – ideas of what "should have been done but wasn't" to deal with the "arrival of tourism," as those involved in this process put it. In sum, we are faced with 'ideal' recommendations on one hand, and descriptions of the real world implementations of a flawed model, on the other.

The following text can be taken as an example of one of these more focused studies, insofar as it aims to show the implications of the implementation of tourism in a specific context, that of Ilha Grande, including the meaning and particular form assumed by 'tourism' on this island, especially for the population of Abraão village, which was abruptly transformed into a popular destination for tourists and vacationists. Simultaneously, the article looks to show the difficulties of applying 'an ideal form of tourist development' when dealing with the particular features of the local context.

Any attempt to study and understand life on Ilha Grande today has to take into account this new component of 'tourism.' My experiences during research conducted on the island since 1999, particularly in Abraão, into the local perception of 'environmental issues,' quickly obliged me to consider a series of problems related to 'tourism issues.' Turning to various works in this field of research, I perceived the parallelism between the situations described in these studies and what could be seen in Abraão. The cases recorded and analyzed in the literature and what I have been able to observe in Abraão village suggest a model for the implications of tourism in contexts where it has only recently been introduced. Below I show how Ilha Grande matches this model and how certain questions flourish there surrounding 'tourism,' particularly in terms of the polarization between natives and non-natives, a conflict which interferes strongly in this area of tourism and its correlation with ecological issues.

Ilha Grande: an illustration of the perverse model of the 'arrival of tourism'

Before drawing this parallel, showing the points where Ilha Grande exemplifies this model of the repercussion of the sudden implantation of tourist activities, I provide a panorama of the island in general.

The 'history of Ilha Grande' reflects all the major economic cycles found in the 'history of Brazil,' more specifically including the formation of a *caiçara* culture.¹ In the 20th century, island life was shaped by two activities involving in some form the entire population: fishing and the penal institutions located in the villages of Abraão and Dois Rios, symbolically concentrated on the Vila Dois Rios prison, referred to by everyone as 'the Prison,' an institution with which the island was frequently equated. Following the steep reduction in fishing activity from the 1970s onwards,² and with the closure of the prison in the 1990s, tourism gradually became the most important local economic activity (Mello 1987).

Some of the old sardine factories dotted around the beaches on the island's mainland-facing side, today transformed into small hotels, provide eloquent and expressive testimony to the switch from a fishing economy to a tourist-based economy. Physically adapted to their new function, the charming buildings with their idiosyncratic architecture provide a concrete image of this transition. But a more recent event, one that produced a profound effect on the island's life, should also be factored into this transition: the implosion and closure in 1994 of 'the Prison' – the Cândido Mendes Penal Institution, located in Dois Rios village since 1903. Indeed, most of the island's residents and visitors hold this event responsible for the subsequent rapid growth in tourism. Although this direct equation between closure of the prison and the expansion of tourism can be disputed (Wunder 2000), there is a local consensus that the removal of the prison not only led to the 'explosion' of tourism, but also the exposure of the island to what is seen as a full-scale 'invasion.'

Another recent factor in Ilha Grande has been the creation of different conservation areas since the start of the 1970s.³ This helps explain why, considered as an area of environmental protection, and once freed of the shadow cast by the ominous presence of the prison, the island acquired the image of an 'ecological paradise' to be visited and enjoyed, but also preserved. Naturally the Ilha Grande's tourist appeal is centred on this idea, as we can glean from the advertising brochures and websites on the island. Tourism here should be primarily understood, therefore, as ecotourism.

This, then, is the framework within which we can see Ilha Grande: firstly, the original *caiçara* culture, which later coexisted with a small-scale commercial fishing economy (1930s to 1970s); secondly, the implementation of the conservation units, which imposed a series of restrictions in terms of occupying and using the land (from the 1970s onwards); and thirdly, the presence of prisons and a police culture, which came to be associated with the island (from the end of the 19th century to the 1990s). This sequence culminates with a sudden switch to tourism in the 1990s, related, as we have seen, to the deactivation of the prison. The presence of Rio de Janeiro State University is also connected to the closure of the prison, since the state government signed a transfer of use agreement granting the university use of the area formerly occupied by the penal institution for a period of fifty years. This transfer established various commitments, including the installation of an environmental studies centre, the development of research, and the creation and maintenance of a museum.

While many people view the transition 'from prison to tourism' as the key factor explaining the changes occurring on the island, Abraão village – the 'Ilha Grande's capital,' where the passenger boats connect the island to the ports of Angra and Mangaratiba – seems to have borne most of the impacts caused by these changes. The

island is now seen as ‘exposed’ and ‘invaded.’ Some of the *caiçaras* have left, expelled from different beach settlements by soaring property speculation, while others have stayed and tried to adapt and take advantage of the new situation. However, the concrete effects of this eclosion are most clearly apparent in Abraão village – to the extent that some consider Abraão to be literally ‘ruined.’

Let us turn, then, to the main aspects of the model describing the sudden introduction of tourism, exemplified in the case of Ilha Grande by Abraão village, comparing the latter example with other cases and focusing above all on the negative effects for the local population. Abraão seems to have been caught up in a situation that encapsulates everything the other island communities want to avoid. As well as being the village where the bulk of the recent arrivals interested in the economic activity of tourism have settled, it is also where many tourists stay and where almost all have to pass through to visit the rest of the island. The air is filled with fears that Abraão is going ‘to turn into another Angra’ (Angra dos Reis, the main town of the municipality, cited as a nearby example of precarious and disorganized urbanization) and that the other beaches will ‘turn into Abraão,’ something no-one wants with its floods of people and disfiguring changes. People claim that the number of *pousadas*, or small hotels, was half a dozen just a few years ago: now the figure is closer to eighty with an endless series of new hotels under construction.⁴

In this context, the essential aspect reflecting the perverse model of implanting tourism is the dramatic change to the local life-style, an alteration which in fact encompasses all the other components of the model. This is a wide-ranging process with a host of implications, as we can see in the following assessment by Luchiari (2000) concerning the north São Paulo coastline:

From the 1980s until the present, in large part due to the implementation and paving of the BR-101 (Rio–Santos) highway, tourist activity began to alter the landscape, speeding up the process of urbanization and property speculation, changing the demographic profile with the incoming population, and, added to the policies for preserving the natural resources of the Serra do Mar State Park, also becoming responsible for the process of marginalization, or even expulsion, of *caiçara* communities.
(Luchiari 2000:136).

It should be noted that Ilha Grande combines the same characteristics as various other localities where the ‘arrival’ of tourism has been studied: the paradisiacal image, the status as an environmental conservation area, the ecological appeal. This is the case of the north São Paulo coast in the above situation described by Luchiari (2000), as well as the islands off the São Paulo coast discussed by Furlan (1997), or the specific cases of Ilhabela, examined by Calvente (1997), Saco de Mamanguá, in Parati (RJ), studied by Diegues & Nogara (1994), and Praia do Forte, in Bahia, studied by Lorenzo (1996) and Gomes (2000). The authors of these studies of other similar cases refer to a clash of knowledge practices and logics: “a rupture with the previous ways of fishing and rural life.” “This reality meant the imposition of another logic on the socio-environmental and cultural dynamic.” (Gomes 2000:173). The core of what I refer to here generically as “a change in the local way of life” concerns the disruption of local cultural patterns by a new economic logic dictated by the introduction of tourism. The

impact of this logic is felt at different levels, interconnected as though they were corollaries of each other, in line with a model that can be schematized as follows:

1. drastic changes in the occupation and use of land and in the use of natural resources

- a. prohibitions and interdictions in the case of protected areas
- b. moving of native populations away from their original locations (expulsion, internalization, spatial segregation)

2. destruction of the object of attraction

- a. real estate speculation
- b. densification and overload (people, demands, services, buildings)
- c. infrastructural problems
- d. regulatory problems
- e. “the place isn’t what it used to be”

3. ambiguity in relation to tourism

- a. perplexity of the native population
- b. it’s good – it’s the place’s natural vocation, it generates income
- c. it’s bad – feeling of invasion (the evil which comes from outside)

4. conflicts/clashes of interest and values between different social segments

- a. different segments disputing economic, political, social and cultural space
 - a. natives versus non-natives
 - b. marginalization of the native population
- c. dispute over land and work with the new residents (employees and entrepreneurs working in the tourist industry)
- d. dispute over values

We can see a concrete manifestation of this schema in Abraão village on Ilha Grande. Tourism should ideally be ecotourism – at least, this is the position defended by a certain sector of people interested in the island’s future: environmentalists, specialists from the environmental control bodies, some entrepreneurs from the tourist industry, those championing ecological awareness. However, as in other reported cases of ‘paradise resorts,’ whether or not they are labelled as ecological (the most notorious

examples being Búzios, in the State of Rio, and the Porto Seguro region, in Bahia), the idea of combining tourism and preservation may be ultimately incompatible: in other words, without the careful control and planning demanded by the situation, what eventually occurs is the destruction of the object of attraction and/or preservation (Lorenzo 1996).

Indeed, the immediate impression given by Abraão on anyone's first visit is of a real estate agency – with signs every five metres advertising 'seasonal' leases of houses, rooms, kitchenettes, or other signboards with the daily prices of camp sites and hotels – and of a construction site – with work on two-storey buildings in every nook and cranny of the village. The fact there is always a new construction or an extension being made to the previously existing houses and hotels, clearly indicates an expansion that involves rich and poor, native and non-native alike. On the other hand, though, the statements by many people from different social segments reveal a concern with this expansion: "someone's got to put the brakes on," "enough of hotels," "there has to be a freeze on construction."

Underlying this concern are a number of factors, including the recognition, linked to the question mentioned above, of the destruction of the very object of attraction, insofar as the sheer number of buildings, many of them with two storeys, is already beginning to detract from the village's bucolic image. Another factor is the correlation between the increase in the range of accommodation available and the prospect of a corresponding increase in the number of visitors, a volume which the place "cannot support." Yet another worry factor, one connected to the previous two, is the idea that "it was better before" – which equally translates as "it was better when the Prison was here" – with two main, equally correlated connotations: it was better because "it was safer," since the prison ensured a secure environment; and it was better because "the island was more of an island," far fewer people came, leaving the native people to their own local customs and lifestyle. The idea that "it was better when the Prison was here" is a refrain heard constantly among residents of the area covered by Abraão and Dois Rios, a nostalgia for the sense of security provided by the penal institution while it was up and running. Indeed this is a mantra-like remark in the conversations and interviews on local life (Gomes 2001; Prado 2000; Sousa 2002), accompanied by claims that people were less bothered about convicts escaping from prison than the fact that today 'anyone' can arrive and enter the island without any form of control. This can be observed in the following ironic comments: "In the past, they [the criminals] were forced to come here and wanted to leave at any cost. Today they come at their own free will and never want to leave." "The Prison provided security. Ilha Grande thanks the unknown convict." Hence, what residents claim is that the prison not only ensured order and security, it also helped preserve the island from influxes of outsiders.

The problems worsen during the holidays such as New Year, Carnival, Easter and during the summer high season – a fact I was able to observe myself each January during my research. This shift towards tourism in Abraão took place without any kind of ordered planning, something everyone now recognizes and wishes to amend, while paradoxically continuing within the same doomed economic scheme. Problems of every kind mount, spanning from infrastructural questions that affect everyone in equal measure, to issues that throw the community's different social segments into open conflict, depending on their connection to the tourist industry and a profit-

making mentality that seems to take hold of everything. This money-making logic is also exacerbated during the peak season when everyone wants to “grab their share of the pie.” Abraão then seems like a bull market on steroids – “everything has turned into money,” one resident complains – and summer is the time when everyone protects their own patch; everything is up for sale and rental, while the rubbish and pollution mount and mount. This is also the ideal time for street vendors, continually persecuted by the park inspectors and local council; they set up in the places where demand for refreshments – water, beer, fizzy drinks, biscuits – is highest, satisfying the thirst and hunger of the tide of people wandering across the island in the intense heat of January. And just imagine Carnival. Part of the formal trade sector also tends to float regulations by encroaching on the pavements and roads with their tables and chairs. Disputes flare up over the noise level of music playing until early hours in bars and restaurants located away from the centre and closer to the hotels, which demand the opposite – namely, peace and quiet for their clients. The cruise boat operators also sometimes fall out when some of them fail to comply with collective agreements. The impression is that everyone is competing with everyone else, unencumbered by rules that are not enforced and deals that are not reached or broken. Abraão is ever denser and tenser. This is in stark contrast to its image as the gateway to an ecological paradise – the park right next to the village, the trails leading off to the innumerable beaches, the dazzling beauty – and in even starker contrast to the NO STRESS message printed on the T-shirts sold to tourists.

All of this matches the view of natives and long-term visitors to the island that “the Island isn’t what it was,” observing here that people often refer to their respective settlement on Ilha Grande as ‘the Island.’ In other words, residents of Abraão who say that “the Island isn’t the same anymore” are actually referring to Abraão, which in reality has turned into a cosmopolitan resort with cybercafés and restaurants with menus in English. Tourism, the source of all this change, is seen in ambiguous terms – on one hand, responsible for the transformation of local life and people’s yearning for the past; on the other, valued as a source of jobs. Hence the nostalgia for another time and the complaints over the island’s ‘invasion’ expressed by the more long-standing and older residents, appear alongside more positive evaluations of tourism as a source of opportunities for everyone. An old resident summed up these ambiguous feelings: “I used to swim in that river,” he said, pointing to one of the streams running through the village, today transformed into polluted, rubbish-strewn gulleys. “The entire Island has grown a lot... it’s not prepared for so many people... If someone doesn’t apply the brakes... It’s grown and has generated jobs, but it’s time to stop. The waterfall has dried up... You don’t see the island residents anymore, everything’s new. No more hotels should be built.”

We can note that this resident’s reminiscing contains many of the factors cited concerning the rapid changes imposed by the introduction of tourism, including a point that seems to me especially prominent in the case of Ilha Grande: namely, the polarity between ‘natives’ and ‘non-natives.’ Remarks such as “now there are more outsiders than islanders,” “where are the natives?” “now most people here are outsiders” and “we don’t know who’s who anymore” are repeated alongside “it was better when the Prison was here” as constant refrains in the discourse of residents from Abraão and Dois Rios. But who actually are these natives whose designation and meaning seem to acquire such prominence in my quick description of Abraão? This is the question to which we shall now turn.

We have seen in the above account how Abraão village on Ilha Grande illustrates the model of a sudden introduction of tourism, as abstracted from other studied cases: indeed, the entire process engulfing Ilha Grande is very similar to those presented in the various studies I cited at the start of this section, so much so that we can say that together they form variations of a single phenomenon. But I now wish to examine a specific point that I believe is more pronounced in the case of Ilha Grande. This concerns the polarity between natives and non-natives, a topic I shall explore in conjunction with the issue of ecology-based proposals, pursued by some “for the good of everyone.”

Natives and non-natives: a key issue

One of the components of the model described in the previous section, namely the question of the relations between the local population and the migrants and new visitors drawn to the location by the introduction of tourism – frequently at the cost of part or all of the original population – seems to comprise the most exacerbated issue in the case of Abraão, encompassing all the others. The polarity between ‘natives’ and ‘non-natives’ is a structural and structuring feature of the way in which residents of Ilha Grande perceive themselves and the way they are led to perceive those who arrive to live alongside them, an aspect I have demonstrated in other works (Prado 2002, 2003, forthcoming). I think that, although the classification natives versus non-natives can be traced back to earlier periods of Ilha Grande’s history, it acquires a special weight and meaning in this more recent context involving the pronounced emphasis on tourism.⁵ And here, once again, Abraão village is the location on the island which seems to most clearly illustrate the various concrete aspects of this classification.

It must have already become clear to the reader that I am not speaking of ‘natives’ here in the way we anthropologists usually employ the term to refer to the ‘native viewpoint’ or the ‘native categories’ of those we research. Punning aside, in this case we can say that ‘native’ is a native category – a naturalized term, therefore, used frequently in local discourse. It has an important use and meaning in local life, corresponding to an equally important axis of classification.

Like any category relating to social identity, the term ‘native’ is also employed contextually for contrastive effect (in relation to those seen as non-natives) and dependent on particular values (what it means to be native) and attributes (what characterizes natives). In this case, it also covers gradations and hierarchizations, determining the quality of being ‘more’ or ‘less’ native, implying more or less importance and prestige in a given situation. In terms of this gradation, we can say, with a lot of quote marks, that the ‘most native natives’ in the local imaginary are the *caiçaras*, seen as Ilha Grande’s true natives – also sometimes romantically cited as representatives of the island as it was and should be – to the extent that the term *caiçara* is frequently used as a synonym of native. At the other pole, that of the non-natives, it is more difficult to define the corresponding category, but the polarity appears to be clearest in relation to the ‘*pousadeiros*,’ hotel owners, and the other

members of the tourist industry who have arrived from outside – especially the most recent newcomers – and set up there with varying degrees of economic power.

‘Being from the island’ may be cited as a form of legitimation in certain contexts; for example, in public meetings covering subjects of collective interest, when one may hear a public figure coming from Angra say: “I was born on Ilha Grande, my family is from Saco do Céu,” or “my family has lived here for over a hundred years.” On the other hand, one can also hear others making excuses for themselves: “I won’t lie, I was born in Quintino,” and indicting those seen to lack any sincerity: “That bloke says he’s from here and wants to protect the island’s interests, but it’s a lie, he comes from Resende.” In other words, it is those who feel they are from Ilha Grande who make remarks or insinuations concerning those who are not: “Those people who keep on coming, who are not from the island and end up staying; they now form the majority – that’s why the island’s changed, that’s why Ilha Grande has lost its island charm.” This influx of people who “keep on coming and ended up staying,” and who belong to segments other than the tourist entrepreneurs, includes, for example, ‘North-eastern farm workers,’ who help supply the workforce needed for all the new buildings, the craftwork ‘hippies,’ and many who come in search of jobs in the numerous commercial establishments.

Here, the police are also seen as natives of a kind. Due to the symbolic importance of the prison on Ilha Grande, an institution with which the island was equated for a long time – so much so that it still heavily shapes its identity – being connected to the prison is like being from the island. This is the case of the older police members, today retired, and those who worked in the prison and remain active. All of them have lived in Abraão since “the time of the Prison,” and many actually belong to island families through blood ties or marriage. This group – which has a pronounced visibility due to its continued occupation of the same houses provided by the State to its past or present employees from the prison system, located in an area of Abraão referred to as ‘the Village’ – are also opposed to ‘outsiders’ like any other native.

There are also many others who consider themselves natives by dint of living on Ilha Grande for a long time and having adopted the island, while likewise feeling adopted by it: “I can consider myself a native, I’ve lived here a long time,” an idea which, as may be imagined, is perfectly capable of being used as a positive claim, just as it may also be questioned, depending on the situation.

As we can see, there are many ways in which people locate themselves on the spectrum from ‘native’ to ‘non-native.’ We can also note a number of overlapping categories on both sides, including the question of class: ‘natives’ / ‘poor’ / employees / local tradition, on one side; ‘non-natives’ / ‘rich’ / bosses / environmentalists, on the other. It is important to observe that this is a dominant configuration at the level of meanings and that it has a strong symbolic effect. Obviously many ‘natives’ are well off and active leaders of the local tourist industry, while many ‘non-natives’ are poor employees of the former. It can also be noted that practically half of Abraão’s small hotels, as well as many of its commercial establishments, belong to local families. It is also obvious that environmentalists come in all shapes and sizes. However, where conflicts arise, it is this equation of categories that is brought into play.

Among the episodes and situations that illustrate the polarization and the way in which natives position themselves and/or are seen as hostile to outsiders are the constant accusations and complaints issuing from both sides. “They’re not interested, they’re closed to the world, it’s no use us trying to propose anything,” claim the outsiders, adding: “Abraão is like that: everybody makes big demands but nobody takes part... They look at those from outside differently but don't want to do anything; they just set up their stall in the backyard and earn a little bit of cash.” On the other hand, the natives complain that they are ignored and disregarded, sometimes allocating themselves a less favourable social position: “those in power have to think more about us *caiçaras* and less about their own pockets... they need to focus more on the community rather than tourism;” “I think they favour a particular group: the middle and upper classes; it seems the poor are forgotten.”

There are other indicators allowing us to perceive this polarity in everyday life.⁶ One of these indicators – bringing us back to our core theme – is perhaps the way people position themselves in relation to the ‘type of tourism’ they want, leading to postures that vary among natives and non-natives alike. For example, we can observe a clear division in the way in which, on one hand, the tourist industry entrepreneurs who come from outside – whether hotel owners, boat owners, or owners of other commercial establishments – are keen to exercise their ‘professionalism’ and demand the same from the natives, while the latter are interested in adapting as best they can, making the most of their resources and skills to meet their own needs.

What we can see above all here in terms of this basic aspect of local life, the relationship with tourism, is the connection with ecological themes, around which the polarity between natives and non-natives becomes strikingly expressed. In this context, which is seen in various ways as a siege on Ilha Grande, there is a clear dispute between the actors present – residents, visitors, NGO environmentalists, public environmental bodies, universities – over the campaign to ‘save the island.’ The differences boil down to why, to what end and for whom it is to be saved.

This situation can be seen as a case of the established and outsiders in the sense used by Elias & Scotson (2000) in their work, only that in Abraão, in contrast to the case analyzed by these authors, the ‘established people’ – who enjoy the balance of power – are those who come from outside, arriving recently and setting up as tourist entrepreneurs, while the outsiders – those excluded from power – are the natives/older residents, who have become the local tourist industry’s workforce. But, as far as I can tell, the ‘natives’ of Abraão respond with another power – with strong symbolic and practical repercussions – which involves remaining impervious and resistant to the ‘civilizing’ attempts of those ‘from outside.’ After all, who really understands this paradise? Who can say what is good for the island?

Exotic species

Behind this question of the polarity between natives and non-natives on Ilha Grande is another question, namely the clash between different value systems. This can be understood and analyzed via an anthropological perspective, starting out from the symbolic level and the production and negotiation of meanings. In this sense, the

polarity and consequent resistance shown by natives to incorporating the ideas dictated by non-natives can be understood as an element of the local cultural schema (in the terms used by Sahlins 1981) which has flourished vigorously following the introduction of tourism and an ecological ideology. Sahlins (1992, 1997) has provided us with an insightful demonstration of how different peoples appropriate the market's 'impositions' in their own way, transforming and using them in accordance with their culturally demarcated values and 'interests,' and 'sending them back' – if not confronting the system, then at least affronting it in surprising ways.

Another parallel can be drawn with what an old story teller from an African tribe told the anthropologist Laura Bohannan, after her stressful attempts to recount the story of Hamlet to the natives, presuming its universal meaning. After the group of listeners had turned the story of Hamlet upside-down, changing the meanings of each episode, de-authorizing at each step the explanations and justifications given by the anthropologist, or in other words, constructing another story, the old man said to her: "You must tell us some more stories of your country. We, who are elders, will instruct you in their true meaning, so that when you return to your own land your elders will see that you have not been sitting in the bush, but among those who know things and who have taught you wisdom." (Bohannan, 1967: 54) An old resident of Dois Rios village on Ilha Grande told me: "Everything went down hill after 'Imbamba' arrived." This remark, which expresses a range of different ideas, reflects an issue frequently present in localities that have been transformed into environmental preservation areas or conservation units: namely, the rigour with which protection laws are applied in relation to "traditional populations." 'Imbamba' in this native discourse means 'IBAMA' – the acronym referring to the name of the federal environmental control body active throughout the country – and suggestively illustrates the translations and nuances which the sound of the terms from the 'ecology/environment' field and their meanings acquire from local viewpoints

In my research on the island, I have been able to perceive different reactions to environmental legislation. Among other views, this reflects a clear reaction to what is seen locally as an excessiveness, or absurdness, in the demands made by environmental control bodies in terms of the local population. From their viewpoint, depending on the case, a person 'can' – hunt, cut down a palm tree, take away a wheelbarrow of sand, chop down a tree, fish. The criterion is necessity, the poverty of the natives, who 'really need' these resources and will not sell them. In this case, we are faced with two codes of relating to nature: the traditional/local and the environmentalist ideology of protection. The natives seem to want a different interpretation of the environmental legislation for themselves: for them, the foundations of their local code should apply.

Among the different value systems and interests confronted by the natives of Ilha Grande is the one I refer to as an 'environmentalist ideology' – itself containing many nuances and taking many forms, such as legislation, the environmental control bodies and environmentalist groups – that aims to 'civilize' the natives. Here we can draw an analogy with the many cases of 'traditional populations' affected by the transformation of their places into conservation units, where, in addition to the perplexity of the original inhabitants, an inevitable conflict of viewpoints and interests emerges between them and the State as the latter seeks to enforce compliance with legislation.⁷ As frequently occurs in these cases, including on Ilha Grande, the view of

most environmentalists is that native approaches are generally ‘unecological,’ that is, they indicate an ‘absence of’ rather than ‘the presence of a native ecology’ (an ‘ethnoecology’) or a particular vision. Likewise, the natives of the island in general also react against ‘ecology’ (very often referred to as an entity, something which has arrived).

As well as this ‘ecologizing’ perspective brought from outside and based on a particular set of factors, related to the introduction and intensification of tourism on Ilha Grande, a range of other views can be found. Some of these even converge, combining ecology and tourism, as in the case of ecotourism, which is held to be more than appropriate in an area containing conservation units. In the case of Ilha Grande, in addition to preservation and protection in a wide sense, the law demands full protection of its ‘park’ and ‘reserve’ areas. Thus, among the many preoccupations of the specialists concerning the topic is the concern over ‘exotic species,’ also referred to as ‘invasive species.’ The reference here is to the natural environment – for example, plants and animals coming from one environment and introduced into another, with the potential to provoke disequilibria and damage to their new environment. On Ilha Grande, there is the famous case of the arrival of tamarin monkeys, responsible for the diminution in the variety and quantity of birdlife (since they feed on eggs); recently, there was also the case of the ‘African giant snail,’ which devours everything in its path and has no indigenous predator.

Much care is demanded concerning this issue. UERJ, which has a campus on the island, home to the Centre of Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development, is developing a large number of research projects dealing with these biological/ecological questions. Attending this Centre’s meetings, I was able to see my biology colleagues debating in heated and serious discussions (leading to the creation of a Commission of Exotic Species to study the various cases). Here and in other meetings held by the different bodies working to find solutions for Ilha Grande’s problems, I was able to perceive the way in which the natives are categorized and objectified within a program of wanting to educate and civilize them ecologically – yet I cannot help thinking that, for these same natives, we are the exotic species.

Anthropology’s relativizing perspective makes the metaphor of exotic/invasive species irresistible⁸ – terms, in fact, used directly to designate many ‘others’ in world history or in day-to-day life, depending on the position of the speaker. The obsession of biologists and environmental specialists with the threat posed by ‘exotic’ and ‘invasive’ species, and the damage they cause, echoes the idea that, as we saw in the previous section, for the natives it is we who ‘intrude there’ and we who are the exotic species.

I conclude here by returning to the observation made at the outset concerning studies of tourism, namely the contrast between generalizing proposals relating, for example, to “an ideal form of tourist development” and the many real world cases where such proposals have failed to work. The refusal, or resistance, of the natives of Ilha Grande to adopt the ecological creed⁹ is consistent with the resistance they equally show towards certain proposals for implementing tourism, or ecotourism.

In concrete cases such as the one discussed here, the formulators and proponents of 'solutions' to the 'tourism issue,' based on established premises for an "ideal form of tourist development," are part of a social configuration in which various actors are in dispute – a fact which is not always recognized by these proponents, as if these recommendations could float safely above any questioning, sanctioned by their very content: self-evidently for the good of everyone. This seems to be the case whenever a proposal with the aura of 'ecology' or the prefix 'eco' is involved – if it is ecological, it must be good; 'eco' translates as 'okay.' The same equally applies, therefore, to the idea of 'ecotourism,' whose promoters in practice seem to locate their own ideas as part of an 'ecological reasoning' beyond question. But, as we have seen, this ecological aura – on the many levels in which it translates – can be considered just as invasive from the native viewpoint as the exotic species are from the viewpoint of the ecologists.

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Notes

¹ The term ‘caiçara’ is used to designate the way of life of the native population of a stretch of the Brazilian coast. Similar to the use of the term ‘caipira’ for certain segments of the inland rural population, the idea of *caiçara* involves an essentially subsistence economy based on small-scale farming and fishing with particular defining cultural features (for a more indepth analysis, see Adams 2000; Calvente 1997; Diegues 1998). On Ilha Grande, the term *caiçara* is also used for those people who consider themselves the island’s ‘true’ natives.

² This reduction in commercial fishing took place from the 1970s onwards due to various concomitant and correlated processes, such as: the pressure from external groups of large-scale commercial fishing; the decline in fish stocks; the closure of local sardine factories; the creation of conservation units; the expulsion of *caiçaras* as a result of property speculation. Today, only Provetá among the island’s various communities/beaches lives off fishing, observing that the boat owners also transport tourists during the high seasons.

³ Ilha Grande – which contains a cross-section of Atlantic Rainforest ecosystems – is made up of various Conservation Units, created from the 1970s onwards through different legislative measures and managed by different government agencies: Tamoios Environmental Protection Area, Ilha Grande State Park, Praia do Sul Biological Reserve and Aventureiro State Sea Park.

⁴ According to the list produced by Angra dos Reis local council, there were 65 *pousadas* in Abraão village in 2002.

⁵ It is not my intention to reconstruct a history of this issue, neither generically – recognizing that ‘the other’ is a classic theme in anthropology, against which human groups defend and define themselves – nor on Ilha Grande; instead, I wish to consider it via the transformation recently taking place on the island.

⁶ Such as, for example: who, in certain contexts, says ‘us’ and ‘them;’ who is present, and in what way, in local religious cults (following the procession of Saint Sebastian and greeting each other warmly at the moment of the ‘Peace of Christ’ ritual at mass; exercising the sociability enabled by frequenting Evangelical cults); who loves going to bingo games sponsored for various fundraising purposes; who organizes the Three Mouths Festival – programmed and held so as to avoid being exploited as a tourist attraction – and who attends it.

⁷ The studied cases are numerous; see, for example,, Diegues (1998), Diegues & Nogara (1994), Furlan (1997), Gomes, L (2000), Lorenzo (1996) and Luchiari (2000).

⁸ The fecundity of this metaphor of exotic/invasive species is demonstrated in the work of Comaroff & Comaroff (2001), who show how a series of questions

surrounding citizenship, community and national sovereignty in the ‘new’ South Africa, in a context of ‘post-racism’ and civil rights, was thematized in the discourse and ‘solutions’ issued in various instances in relation to ‘plant invaders.’ We can also consider, in the cited case of *Achatina fulica*, the metaphoric eloquence of the popular name given to the species: ‘African snail.’ It was brought to Brazil to be cultivated as escargot, but failed to gain a market: the species is dark, large, tough fleshed and became nefarious; in people’s explanations, it is compared with escargot, which is light-coloured, rounded and soft-fleshed, and causes no harm.

⁹ I have been working on this question in various cited works (Prado 2000, 2002, 2003, forthcoming). Also see Ranauro (2003).