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REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FOREST
*A social anthropological study of a village on the border of
the dry deciduous forest in Madagascar*

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Abstract

Soatany is a village of subsistence farmers in the Menabe central (Madagascar). The village was established mostly by immigrants coming from the south of Madagascar. The current location of the village and its cultivation sites used to be forest territory. The story of the village is the story of a successful transformation of a forest into a prospering village. This is the important background of the local representation of the forest. Soatany is subject to an important internal migration. There is the shared idea by the Malagasies, of «forest »as substructure for a successful installation on the land. The newcomers are taking possession of «open »grounds, which in the perception of the first arrivals, are places reserved for the spreading of their descendants. Because of cultural differences this conflict is mostly felt between the ethnical groups living in the village center and the Antandroy living in the hamlets of the village.

The village is under an important impact of several conservationist projects. The NGO Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust initiated the project of the GCF (Gestion Contractuel de la Forêt). The family of the *fokontany*-president has appropriated this project to their advantage. Consequently the project is not perceived as a communal project by the villagers of Soatany but as a private actor in the interest of the *fokontany*-president family. The cultivation on the village territory is monitored by another NGO called «Fanamby », which controls the expectations of the interdiction of forest deforestation. This monitoring is badly received by all the villagers. The locals feel as to having lost important sovereignty over the village land to the *vazaha* (foreigners). This constant intervention in their cultivation habits is touching spheres of the utmost importance for the villagers. This situation of the constant arrivals of newcomers and the pressure of the conservationist projects becomes tactile in the recounted stories about blood-thieves representing the image of the *vazaha* taking away the pure essence of life and persons having risen from the death, as image of the infinite regeneration of the immigrant.

This is dedicated entirely to the fokontany president and his wife. As all the other projects before they have won me wholeheartedly and I look up to their smartness and ability of handling difficult situations.

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Cover photo: «Forest of Soatany».

The red color painted on the trees indicates the borderline. One part of the forest is still open for the extraction of forest products for the villager, the other part is under total restriction, nothing should be extracted.

“Dans le système de référence symbolique des pratiques divinatoires (*uinta*) le rouge (*mena*) associé à l’or et à l’astre solaire qui représente l’autorité en général et le pouvoir royal en particulier” (Sophie Goedefroit 1998 p. 94).

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List of Abbreviations

Central Menabe	Zone of Madagascar located between the Morondava and the Tsiribihina rivers
CFL	Contrôleur forestier locaux
CFPF	Centre de Formation Professionnelle Forestière, Morondava Madagascar
Durrell	Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, organization for the help of endangered species
Fanamby	Environnemental Malagasy Non-Governmental Organization
GCF	Gestion contractuelle des forêts
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature (now the World Conservation Union)
Kirindy Forest	Research and touristic center in the dry deciduous forest of Kirindy, western coast of Madagascar
NEAP	National Environmental Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PFM	Research project the «Paysages Forestiers du Menabe»
SAHA Menabe	Organization for rural development in the western coast of Madagascar, Morondava, Madagascar, (Intercoopération, DDC)
SDC	Swiss agency for Development and cooperation
UNEP	United Nations Development Program
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
ZPC	Zone «prioritaire de conservation»

Malagasy	English
ala(be)	(big) forest
an'ala	in the woods
anabo	up
andrefa	west
Soatany	anonymised name for a village on the western coast of Madagascar
Antesaka	ethnic group from the southern part of Madagascar
Antandroy	ethnic group from the south of Madagascar
Antanosy	ethnic group from the south
antinana	east
Ariary	currency of Madagascar
atime	south
avaratse	north
Betsileo	ethnic group from the east coast
biby	animal
dahalo	thief
fokontany	administrative unit , dispartment of the municipality
hatsake	cultivation sites
havtschy	baobab bark
Iaban'I'.... /Baba ny	the father of ...
lunaky	the oldest living person with rights towards all ceremonies
maizina	darkness, ignorance, evil forces
maman'I	the mother of..
mazava	clarity, light
Merina	Ethical group from the highlands Madagascars
monka	fallow land, abandoned fields
monka	spent land
trandraky	small hedgehog-like mammal
tany fivelômana	land to guard for the descendants,
tany malalaka	land where there is pace
tavy	north dialectique variation for slash and burn agriculture
Tjanindrazana	ancestral village
Tohin-Tana	village linkpin
tompon-tany	master of the land
vahiny	guest, stranger to the place
zanahary	force of creation
zazatany	child of the Earth, child born locally to immigrated parents
zebu	Malagasy oxen

Part I

Introduction

Chapter 1

The «Paysages Forestiers du Menabe» (PFM) project in Madagascar

My study was linked to a larger research project entitled «Paysages Forestiers du Menabe» carried out under the direction of the Forestry Development Group, Department of Forest Sciences, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETHZ).

In 1978, the Forestry Development Group, in collaboration with the Swiss agency for Development and cooperation (SDC) established a Center for Professional Training in Forestry (Centre de Formation Professionnelle Forestière CFPF) in Morondava (Madagascar). The goal of the CFPF was to develop sustainable silvicultural practices for the selective logging of the dry deciduous forest of the Malagasy west coast ([Laurent 1996]p.5). This included a forest concession inside the Kirindy forest some 100 km to the north of Morondava. Today this forest concession is the core zone of a larger forest protection zone. In a research partnership with the *deutsche Primatenzentrum*, the CFPF established a forest center for scientific research and facilities to host tourists.

As of 1991, different projects supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and cooperation in the region of Menabe have been integrated into «Program Menabe». The ultimate goal of this program was the development of methods for the sustainable use of natural resources of the Menabe including improving agricultural practices so as to reduce pressure on the remaining forest ([Laurent 1996] p.5).

The present research project «the Paysages Forestiers du Menabe» (PFM) is part of this set of projects, also supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and cooperation. The goal of the «Paysages Forestiers du Menabe» (PFM) research project is to establish a set of basic principles, that will result in a database for the elaboration of a management plan for the whole region of the Central Menabe, Madagascar. In their words ¹: ” *In targeting the improvement of the livelihood of local populations and the maintenance of multifunctionality especially the ecological value of the forest, the*

¹Original text in English

present project aims at developing scientific criteria for a sustainable management of forest landscapes in western Madagascar at a regional scale ” ([Dirac et al. 2006], p.31).

The factors they examine to establish scientific criteria are described as follows: ” *A detailed inventory of resources and a specific understanding of stakeholder requirements and strategies will allow drawing an accurate picture of the human-forest interface ” ([Dirac et al. 2006], p.31)* The project involves the following stages:

- ” 1. *An assessment of the role of forest products and local knowledge about forest and tree management in the livelihood strategies (human-forest interface)*
2. *A determination of the production potential and regeneration capacity of the most important forest products that underpin livelihoods.*
3. *Deducing potentialities and constraints for sustainable management of a landscape with a major forest component ” (Project description p. 2).*

One line of investigation in this project is being followed by Clémence Dirac, a PhD student at the ETHL. ²She is investigating non-timber forest products, and while she is focusing on the extraction of two forest tubers, she is also studying hunting, and honey production as well as how forest soils are used for agriculture and cattle breeding. She is interested not only in these practices, but examining the current density of these non-timber resources through an inventory in order to find alternatives that are more sustainable. Through the results of her research it will be possible to ascertain if money for ecological services (PES) would be a good solution for the Central Menabe region.

Lanto Andriambelo another PhD Student is making an inventory of the trees used by the villagers. For this purpose he is surveying primary forest, newly created plant sites on forest soils, old *monkas*³ used for cattle breeding, recently abandoned planting sites, and other types of site. He wants to find out more about biodiversity and about how quickly the resources are replaced in these sites.

The project is structured by general objectives, local interaction with the forest; to determine the local production/use of forest products and their importance for inducing local people. The second is to undertake a scientific analysis to ascertain whether this local production/use conforms with sustainability requirements. It is important to understand whether giving responsibility to the local communities will result in a sustainable situation or if further measures have to be considered.

” *Il s’agit surtout de tenir compte de deux avancées majeures, quasiment philosophiques, de ces dernières années: d’une part les préoccupations internationales et nationales quant à la conservation de la biodiversité, notamment en ce qui concerne le rôle de la forêt et de la foresterie dans ce contexte; d’autre part la perception moderne des besoins des populations, notamment péri-forestières, qui implique une approche socio-économique de l’interface homme-forêt” (Kammersheidt et al. 2004, in [Sorg 2002], p.70).*

The national and international implications of environmental projects in Madagascar will be broached as an issue in another chapter. The PFM project bothers much about

²The ETHZ acts as supervisor of the research project

³Fallow land or abandoned fields are called *monka*

a direct contact to the local community. The researchers (namely Dirac and Andriambelo) and their assistants live in the villages and have close contact with locals who are integrated into the project as local experts. The research group has limited their research to seven villages in the Central Menabe, all located around the Kirindy forest in which the CFPF research center is situated (map).

As will be developed below, my project involves a deeper look at the man-forest interface from a social anthropology perspective.

1.1 Research questions

In order to understand local representations of the forest, it is important to analyze the local social construction of the environment. How are human beings perceived to be related to the land? What are the crucial ways in which the environment is used: economically, socially symbolically? Which are the factors that allow them to make sense of space? I focus on the conceptions of the forest in Soatany in particular. What is the place of the forest in this region? What is it positioned relative to other local categories and what role does it take in the views and expectations of the inhabitants of the surrounding villages? In order to proceed we must analyze the actual situation in the village. Soatany is situated in a region, that is a popular destination for internal migration. Beyond shared concepts of forest there are differences in how newly arrived immigrants and those of the established families use and view it as a resource. The resulting conflicts can be used to gain an understanding of the actual dynamics surrounding the forest as played out in the villages. Representations of the forest show their importance in the current political situation and find vivid expression in the execution of the local land management plan. The perceptions of personal advantage and social prestige based on these representations influence and also directly affect transformations of the land. As a result my research question is: How and by whom is the land actually constructed in Soatany? This main question is broken down into further subquestion: Who has the power to decide about territory and land use? When does the forest become a topic in the village meetings? Who are the main actors and what are their individual perceptions and interests?

Soatany is in the core zone of several conservation projects. I concentrated on two of capital importance. These projects entail such a degree of outside impact on the political structure of the village, that they can not be ignored in an analysis about local forest representations. I argue that the political situation not only determines how the forest is used and valued, but that it works as a reactive process. This construction then reshapes the local attitude, and actions with respect to the forest, which in turn has effects on the representations of the forest.

Soatany is one of the villages where a program called *Gestion Contractuelle des Forêts*(GCF) is already in place under the administration of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust.

Furthermore Soatany is subject to the supervision of the para-statal NGO «Fanamby

». This means that local representations of the forest must be understood in relation to outside views that have new economic and social impact. How is this outside influence handled within the local community? And are the emic representations influenced through this outside impact?

All of these competing factors have an impact on the situation in Soatany. A village is not an autarkic, clearly defined system; it is and has always been exposed to outside influences, which have an impact on local social practices and representations. Local people have a huge capacity for adaptation and reform. These villagers are, in my view, uncontested champions in handling uncertainty, scarcity and rapid social and environmental change since times long before colonization. With this analysis comes a short investigation about the villagers' hopes and expectations towards the «Paysages Forestiers du Menabe»(PFM) project.

1.2 Methodology

Secondary literature review: analysis of previous studies on the Kirindy Forest, the Menabe area and the ethnic groups of local importance.

Field research: the field research was a qualitative study, based on the classical method of participant observation. Furthermore, informal interviewing methods were used to gather information from experts that was not accessible via observation. In developing my interview techniques, I followed the methodology developed by Leonard Schatzmann and Anselm L. Strauss (1973). This implies that I followed my informants on their daily schedule and joined their work practices, meanwhile asking questions directly context-dependent.

Finally Some Aspects of the A+ method as described by Emmanuel Fauroux (2002) were used for a rapid survey of land ownership and mapping local resources. This consisted in establishing a map of the village families and a general view of the situation of Soatany including the land division between these families with the help of several informants. (Annexe 1)

1.3 Choosing a translator

As I do not speak Malagasy, a translator accompanied me at all times. All the discussion and interviews quoted here are translations. Of course, a lot of information was lost in this way, although some of the interviews and discussions (meetings) I recorded, and translated later to help avoid some of these losses. The citations in the text are in French as they were translated by my translators.

The translator played an important role as a link to the villagers, as it was he who made the first contact with our informants. It was very important to work with a person trusted by the villagers. As the research questions were often very personal and dealing with illegal practices, it helped to have a translator who was from the region, who understood the regional dialect and was used to regional institutions. In addition

he/she had to be of an ethnic group accepted by the villagers.

Clémence Dirac, the PhD student in the research group, proposed a range of translators with whom she already had a good working experience. I had the good fortune to work for four weeks with Mario Ramohavelo who originated from the town of Morondava identified as a member of the ethnic group of the Betsileo. He was well known in the village because he has worked there before for different projects, including with Clémence Dirac for the same research project. His father used to work as a driver for the CFPF and part of his family still is working for the CFPF station in the Kirindy forest. For two weeks I also worked with Yolande Tarovy Soanandrasana, the wife of Mario Ramohavelo's cousin, who also had a lot of experience as a translator and some very valuable family connections to the village of Soatany. Yolande was a descendant of a royal Sakalava family. For the final six weeks I worked with Mario's younger brother Armando Tahiry, who was a student in Antananarivo.

As I was always accompanied by a translator in the field, the transcribed text from interviews sometimes switches from I to we. However, in my reporting of my own reflections and impressions, as they are my personal understanding of the situation, I will use «I »in my text.

1.4 Choosing a village

In January 2007, in my first exploratory phase, I was advised by Clémence Dirac to visit two of the seven villages included in the project; Fiamaro⁴ and Soatany. I later decided to focus my research on the village of Soatany, based on my impression that in Fiamaro the general orientation was towards the sea and that the forest was less palpable in daily conversations and activities (I also confession a personal preference for the village of Soatany). In any event, it became clear to me that in the time at my disposal I could not study two villages in any degree of detail.

1.5 Choosing a family

The first step upon arrival at the village was to present ourselves to the local administration and to state the reasons why we had come to the village. Based on the good relationship established between the PFM research project and the family of the local *fokontany* President, as well as his wife, we were invited to live with them during our stay in Soatany. As there was not enough space for us inside the house we decided to camp behind their house. Later they constructed a bamboo fence for us around our camping site, so as to include our tents within the perimeter of the house. This had the advantage of creating a space within which I could receive my own visitors.

I paid a fee for our food and the cooking done by the wife of the *fokontany* President. The affiliation of the family to the local president of the village gave me the advantage

⁴To keep the protagonists anonymous, all names are fictional.

of being able to observe directly everything going on in the political and administrative domain of the village from the porch of the house. We/I also had the advantage of being introduced to every project and visitor who came to the village, as they all had first to stop by and announce themselves to the local *fokontany* president. Oliver Woolley, who had a similar experience during his fieldwork in the region of the town Vondrozo, Madagascar (2002, p. 9), points out in his introduction that, it is one of the duties of the local leaders to host strangers. And indeed my best informants were the president and his wife. They made a constant effort to keep me informed and organize other contacts for me. As a result I learned a lot about the nature and structure of local government. As Woolley (2002, p.9) also commented, it was especially interesting to see other guests, messengers, subjects, relatives and tribute payers and how they approached and handled this particular family, regarded as powerful and potentially dangerous.

On the other hand, living with the administrative (and traditional) leader in the village did have an effect on the information that I received; I tried to take this important consideration into my analysis.

1.6 Project involvement

My attempt was to occupy a most neutral position of a curious but unimportant observer towards the villagers, in the intention to get access to the least biased information and being able to talk on equal positions with my informants. The problem of the research project is its connection to the *Centre de Formation Professionnelle Forestière* (CFPF). As The CFPF was also in charge of the research center in the Kirindy forest and was the previous owner of the forest concession just bordering the communal forest of Soatany. The CFPF is considered by the locals, as an important player in the region. For the researchers in the CFPF realm there is a certain possibility that they receive the information to suit the suspected interest of this influent organization. But to dispatch myself from this connection was not possible in the time of my research. I benefited from the cars and direct transportation to the village by the drivers of the (CFPF). The first time I came to Soatany I was accompanied by Lanto Andriambelo, a PhD student of the PFM research project. Subsequently, I was accompanied by Mario Ramohavelo or somebody from his family who had worked in the village for the research group as a translator already. In the middle of my stay I received a visit from Dr. Jean-Pierre Sorg who was the supervisor of the PFM research group and was locally known as the «owner» of the Kirindy forest. He was accompanied by four professors and three PhD students, all arriving in the village in huge white 4-wheel drive, air conditioned with tinted windows.⁵

While asking questions about trees and the forest, I tried not to be too obvious in my intent, so as to appear neutral. Despite this, as the discussion below shows, the aim of

⁵After this visit my attempt to present myself as a the poor student was totally ruined. Nobody «unimportant» received visits in this form. Even politicians came to the village on a simple motorbike.

my research and my connection to the CFPF organization appeared to be quite evident to the persons living in Soatany and three months in the village was not enough to dispel this view. I quickly abandoned the explanation that I was a poor student and that this research was only possible because my government was paying for this as it produced an effect opposite from that intended. The Villagers saw this as me being important enough, as this work being important enough, to have a government ready to invest in the project. My position relative to the local people and their perception of my involvement with the CFPF is illustrated by the following conversation with one of the *gendarmes de la forêt*. This man was a local person, living in the village of Soatany, who guided us to the communal forest of Soatany in the second week of our stay in the village. This exchange also illustrates my miserable effort to play down my connection to the CFPF.

Mario my translator: " *Il demande le nom de l'organisation avec laquelle on collabore, si c'est le CFPF?* " (Centre de Formation Professionnelle Forestière)

Katharina : " *... on utilise les voitures du CFPF, mais en fait je n'ai pas encore bien compris comment se passe la collaboration avec le CFPF, peut-être le sais-tu mieux?* "

Mario: " *Moi je m'imagine que c'est un grand partenariat du [projet], PFM (Paysages Forestiers du Menabe), c'est ça?* "

Katharina : " *Mais moi je travaille surtout pour mon diplôme et pour mon université moi. Et aussi pour aider Clémence, mais...* "

Mario translates to the forest guide: They are scholars (students) of Mister Sorg, they are working for a project called PFM, the project is in collaboration with the CFPF. But mostly they are independent students. They are living in the CFPF village in Morondava, but it is the project that pays the money for food and transport. It is not their money.

Katharina to Mario: " *On lui donne le cadeau?* " Mario: " *-Non, pas encore... -Il a demandé ça parce que comme ça il a peur de nous... parce que les gens des fois ils ont peur des étrangers, ils ont peur des gens qui travaillent à Soatany, c'est pour ça qu'il voulait demander si on travaille avec le CFPF et comment était exactement cette collaboration... -pour connaître un peu mieux.* "

Katharina: " *Non, mais on n'est pas des contrôleurs ici* ". Mario: " *Oui je lui ai dit comment ça se passe avec le CFPF -Si on travaille pas pour Fanamby? Il a dit que les Fanamby ne travaillent pas comme Durrell, Durrell travaille plutôt par rapport à tout ce qui est la forêt, et puis les Fanamby travaillent avec les villageois. Avec les cultures (agricoles). (...)* "

This as an illustration that for the villager of Ankoraobato the connection between the CFPF und the research project was quite evident and that it was of eminent importance for them to know our background, to place us in the jungle of the abounded projects coming to the village.

The research project had established itself in the village for some time before I arrived and there have been other students who had stayed in the village. The villagers had had a good deal of experience with handling these kinds of projects since colo-

nial times, no doubt that they knew very well where my interest lay. Even as I tried to integrate myself as much as possible, to distance myself from the familiar method of questionnaires and direct interviews this proved impossible in this short time. On the other hand, it was also reference to the project and local admiration for Clémence Dirac that opened many doors and assured me basic levels of cooperation in the village.

1.7 General description

On the international level, conditions have been drastically reshaped by Madagascar's disastrous economic and political record, as viewed by dominant international organizations. In 1981, the state of Madagascar had to announce total bankruptcy ([Pollini 2007], p.58). The subsequent structural adjustment programs run under the auspices of the World Bank and the IMF opened Madagascar to foreign investments and influence. The 1980's were also the moment when environmental issues began to take on central importance within the international community. Madagascar thus represented an opportunity for the World Bank to «go green» ([Pollini 2007], p. 60), and Madagascar was labeled an international «biodiversity hotspot». The preservation of Madagascar's high level of biodiversity and the fight against its rapid deforestation took front seat on the agenda of the major international conservationist pressure groups such as the IUCN or the WWF ([Pollini 2007], p.60).

On the domestic level, Madagascar is a country with a relatively high and sustained growth in population ⁶. An important number of young people must carve out a place for their own subsistence and find themselves trying to get ahead in the rush for new «land where there is space» (*tany malalaka*). The expansion of kin groups often results in a shortage of land, pushing some of its members to a search for new ground (Keller 2008: 655). Land shortages are further exacerbated by the growing aridity of the land in the south (Goedefroit 1998:70), forcing even settled groups to compete for the last available territories. Therefore the Menabe region has been a destination for internal migration for a long time ([Bourdiec 1980], p.133). Its attraction lies in the comparatively low population density and the still intact forest areas.

The climate of the Morondava region is characterized by a dry season of six to eight months. Most of the rain falls between December and February. The region is characterized by dry deciduous forest interspersed with secondary regrowth and bush land. An observable tropical forest ecosystem as the trees have adapted to the drier climate by shedding their leaves in the dry season to avoid evapotranspiration. Other species like the Baobabs have adapted by evolving the ability to store water in the bulbous trunks. This forest is characterized by three layers, a dense undergrowth, an intermediate layer and a patchy distribution of larger trees. These reach on average a height of 12 to 15 m but can grow up to 25m, dependent on soil characteristics, climate topography and water regime. These dry deciduous forest possess a very high ratio

⁶The World Bank estimates Madagascar's population growth rate at 2,7% in 2006. www.worldbank.org [visited 26.5.09].

of species endemism, species existing only in Madagascar and nowhere else in the world.

1.8 The village of Soatany

As mentioned, the village Soatany is situated in the region called the Central Menabe which is itself located, in an area between the Tsiribihina and Morondava rivers on the west coast of Madagascar. (map) Soatany, Fiamaro and Marofandilia are part of the «Commune de Bemanonga»⁷

Soatany has the political status of a *fokontany* (the smallest administrative unit in Madagascar), administrated by a *fokontany* elected President. Soatany is not serviced by public transportation. To reach the route nationale (RN8), the main travel route from Morondava to the north and frequented by the taxis-brousse network (the public transportation), one has to walk two hours to Marofandilia, the next village to the north. Soatany is divided up into three parts. A village center of about 400-500 inhabitants and two populated hamlets called Ranotana and Fenomaro. This division into three parts reflects, basically, a division along ethnic lines. In the center of the village, where the school is situated and the president of the village lives, most of the inhabitants consider themselves Antesaka⁸ (an ethnic group originating from the South East). In the hamlets of Ranotana and Fenomaro, the majority consider themselves Antandroy⁹, an ethnic group of southern origins.

Soatany is a village of subsistence farmers. Subsistence rice farming is only possible during the rainy season on naturally irrigated rice fields on the borders of the river Tomitsy in the north of the village. There are additional cash crops like are peanuts, maize, manioc and kidney beans that are cultivated on the cleared grounds such as of forest or old *monkas*. I came to Soatany in the time when cultivation begins in the middle/end of September with the preparation of the fields. This consists in cutting down trees and bushes on the chosen plantation site. If it is to become a peanut field the work includes also the cutting away of all the small herbage. Then from the 20th of October onwards the dry wood is set on fire. This date is fixed by an order of the *département des eaux et forêts* and closely observed. After the first rainfall the seed must be sown to guarantee a good harvest. Preferred sites for plantation are forest or *monkas* (spent land) more than ten years old to guarantee a good harvest. The fields are cultivated by the nuclear family consisting of father, mother and young children. Once adult every brother/ sister is cultivating for their own household. Women normally join in the cultivation of their husbands, (expected is a virilocal residence, means the wife follows her husband to the village of his kin) but in the case of a divorce or death

⁷A commune is an administrative unit. Madagascar is divided into six autonomous provinces(*faritany*), 22 regions (*faritra*), about 115 districts (*departamenta*) and about 1400 communes (*kaominina*). Communes are divided into *fokontany* (Pollini 2007).

⁸I will discuss the ethnic classification and interdependence further on.

⁹diverse spelling are possible, also Tandroy as a short form

of the husband, the woman returns to her natal village and can claim a share of the cultivation land out of the heritage of their parents.

If there is enough money wageworkers are engaged to help with the «difficult»work consisting in cutting away the trees and building up the enclosure against zebus and wild pigs. It is normal to lend a hand to aging parents or grandparents. Most of the inhabitants of Soatany are cattle breeders owning zebus (Malagasy oxen), with some owning up to 200 head of cattle. Additional money can be made by working for the regionally active logging enterprises. Soatany is situated south of the forestry concession of the Centre de Formation Professionnelle Forestière (CFPF) which will be considered as a zone «prioritaire de conservation»(ZPC) in the future protected area. The primary forest that the village manages is established as a sort of buffer zone to this concession. It is in the due to the importance of this forest zone that Soatany has been included within the research perimeter.

Chapter 2

Constructing Landscapes

2.1 The concept of landscape

This chapter begins by questioning the concept of landscape. As indicated by the title of the research project «Paysages Forestiers du Menabe», «forest» is understood as a category of landscape and as such is a social construction. It is therefore important to examine the basic features of the landscape concept to understand if this is an applicable concept to the views of local actors and their understanding towards land in general and towards «forest» in particular. It is therefore necessary to look first on the whole setting.

If one looks up the term «landscape» in the Oxford Dictionary of English (2003), one finds the following definition: “ *Landscape is all the visible features for an area of land, or a picture representing an area of countryside, or the distinctive features of a sphere of intellectual activity. As a verb: the improvement of appearance of (a piece of land) by changing its contours, planting trees and shrubs.*” The first explanation of the dictionary is a tricky one. It is plain to see that the making of a picture with ALL visible features of land is simply just not feasible. This is an unaccomplishable task. A landscape, both «real» or as a mental picture of reality includes a lot of decisions about what to include what should be visible and what should remain hidden. These decisions are guided by culture, knowledge, power and politics.

The link between a picture and the notion of landscape as discussed above is not an accidental one. As Eric Hirsch explains in his introduction to “*The Anthropology of Landscape*” (1996) the word landscape was introduced into the English language in the late sixteenth century as a technical term used by painters. In social anthropology landscape can be defined, following as Yvan Droz and Valérie Miéville-Ott (2005,p.4), a composition of three basic conditions: space, environment and sight. The space is the most elementary form of perception, the forms and lines which appear in space build the geomorphologic ground structure. The geomorphologic ground structure does not require life. Life is the second condition for landscape. The geomorphologic ground structure has to be complemented by an ecosystem, or what in biology would be called a biosphere. The geomorphologic ground structure and the environment are supposed to exist independent of all human presence. ([Droz and Mieville-Ott 2005],p.4) But I

argument that there has to be an observer, somebody looking at the sight and interpreting it. Landscape must be interpreted by somebody in order to exist. Thus, notion of sight is important in my argumentation as the third element on which landscape is built. Furthermore view always includes a choice, a direction and never can be neutral or independent of human existence.

As we have now set out the three ground conditions: space, environment and sight, I want also quickly make a clear distinction between landscape and nature. Similarly to landscape, nature is a construction of human representation, but the notion of nature includes a projection of ideals about the original state of the world, untouched by human presence. This is what puts nature into the realm of a mystic experience; nature is made by God, not man. (Durkheim 1968, in [Droz and Mieville-Ott 2005], p.5). The experience of nature is therefore not conditioned on the existence of landscape, there is no need of a view, and even a blind man can experience nature.

In addition to the work of social anthropologists I want to borrow some aspects of landscape from the subject in human geography, where landscape also serves as a key concept. Denis E. Cosgrove in his book “*Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*” offered an approach that sought to recognize that landscape is not merely the world we see, but a construction, a composition of the world, in short an ideological concept ([Cosgrove 1998], p.25). He claims that landscape is a way of seeing - a means by which Europeans have represented to themselves and to others the world about them and their relationships with it ([Cosgrove 1998], p.25). Thus far from being neutral and inert, the concept of landscape has social and cultural meanings, a symbolism – based on the western cultural history and biased by western interpretations of a «picturesque» view. As we will see below neither the symbolism nor the cultural and social meanings this concept contains are in accord with the Malagasy concept of seeing their environment.

2.2 «Paysages Forestiers du Menabe», land in context

The concept of «social construction» emphasizes man’s contribution of the perception of «nature». But construction is not only a metaphor when looking at land in Madagascar. What is judged by the people of this island as a lovely or valuable view on the land is exactly one where humans left their mark, where «construction», «modeling» of land by humans is visible.

The social anthropologist Oliver Woolley in his introduction to *The Earth Shakers of Madagascar* (2002) describes his confusion as an European onlooker seeing a landscape full of «beauty» in its terminal phase, just before being deflowered by cultivation, roads and settlement. He points to the ways his vision has been biased of landscape derived from the Renaissance picturesque view of idyllic «rural-natural» surroundings. He remarked that the Malagasy standing at his side, looking out on the same land, was not seeing landscape but land full of opportunities and was pondering the best way to transform these into a «beautiful» vision full of human presence. “*One day, I was standing with Iaban’I’Zafitala beside his homestead, gazing out at the Wasteland*

stretching into the distance. Invigorated by the view, I was foolish enough to say that the land looked «beautiful»(tsara tarehy) a nonsensical comment to him, and one that begged a contemptuous look. (...) In a final attempt to win approval, I raised my gaze from my feet to the horizon and affirmed that the land was «vast»(malalaka) and «inexhaustible»(tsy mety ho lany). At last Iaban'I Zafitala smiled. Now I was beginning to talk his language because, for him and the other Wastelanders, the land is not a backdrop to life, its life, it is the canvas, not the picture » ([Wooley 2002], p.13).

Following Woolley and my own observations, the land is seen from an emic point of view as a basic prerequisite, the resource that allows the forming of a sphere of culture, adapted to the needs of the living. As it stretches out before the onlookers the view seen through as its potential to carry homesteads and villages. It is not a «landscape» the Malagasy sees. The improvement of appearance of the land has still to come. The landscaping has first to be made. They are not looking at a «picturesque» scene like a European does. A Malagasy is looking out on land. It is not only the view of a craftsman looking on his materials and contemplating how he will sculpt and forge it into the needed forms, but even more the genius of an artist that is aware of the status and reputation his creation could convey upon him. And it is the look of a man who likes to succeed in making a mark on the land, as the founder of a prospering kin group, visually blessed by the ancestors and well anchored in the ground.

Once this transformation is achieved, there is a strong notion of progress and development when people look at their surroundings. There is a great feeling of satisfaction for them in the fact that like their forefathers, they have succeeded in taming the wild. I felt in Soatany that the changing environment is seen as mirror of social improvement. Soatany is not an old village; it was founded two generations ago by Antesaka immigrants working for a logging company cutting wood in the area. *Iaban'I*¹ Emanuelle (who is about forty) told me as we were walking out of the village past all the cultivation sites that when he was a boy, all of this used to be forest. He seemed to be proud of the achievement, implying that it is a good thing that all this is now in the past. What he expressed was something in the sense of “*Look around, what we made out of it, a proper village where everybody makes his living*”.

To produce life out of this land is to achieve the potential of human beings to transcend their impermanent nature. Maurice Bloch a social anthropologist who studied the ethnical group of the Merina and the Zafimaniry in Madagascar since 1961 argues that humans reproductive success can come close to immortalizing the producers. This immortalization of the producers by means of reproduction is called «the process of growth» by Eva Keller. It is of particular importance for any rural Malagasy to generate many descendants and being able to pass on land to them. Having obtained one's ancestors blessing becomes visible when the members of a person's growing kin group work of the land. One's children and grandchildren are living testimony of an elder person's success on the way to becoming an ancestor himself ([Keller 2008], forthcoming). The valorization of having children is well expressed in Soatany by the manner parents are addressed by the name of their first child. In this case the father of Emanuelle is

¹lit. the father of Emanuelle

referred to as *I babany Emanuelle*. Or the mother of Thérèse as *maman ny Thérèse*. Gillian Feeley-Harnik, a social anthropologist studying the ethnic group of the Sakalava on the west coast of Madagascar, describes gardens and rice fields as places where the people are «cultivating their generation » [Feeley-Harnik 1991], p.159). It is not only for their immediate needs that they cultivate, it is a process that is future-oriented ([Keller 2008], forthcoming). Perhaps one will not see fruition of one's projects in the course of one's life, but one is also cultivating with a vision to the future growth of one's kin. Every new generation adds a further layer of power to the patina of the ancestors. The remolding of the land is not a simple endeavor. The one who is challenging the land, the forest, the sky and the weather is challenging the force behind this insensible environment. The force of all creation is called *zanahary* ([Bloch 1997], p.179). Before one has succeeded in becoming a part of the land thanks to the powerful connection and anchorage by the ancestors, one is exposed to the barren forces of the untamed environment. However, the powers of the ancestors are not as important as *zanahary*, and are also different in nature. An individual disposing of the blessing of its ancestors has like a ring of protection, a feeble windscreen behind which one can last out the worst storms. Furthermore the ancestors offer an area of response, warning and negotiation. By means of offering and divination one can find out about and even marginally influence the tide of destiny. By engaging with the land, one exposes oneself directly to this uncaring environment and all the forces that lay within it. But this offers that one has the challenging possibility to interfere, to get access to this strong force, the force, that enacts life.

In my first attempt of this text I tried to focus on the village-forest opposition in a true Levi-Straussian fashion: to construct the village as representation of culture - and the forest as representation of nature, the wild, the untamed. I realized (thanks to Eva Keller) that just because the forest was my focus of study, this must not mean that «the forest» as a concept, really exists in the Madagascan culture and really represents a point of reference to local people of soatany. In my on defense I have to say that the structural opposition of «the forest » and «the village»: «the agonistic pair» ([Clare 2006], p.314) is often put forward as an argument, mostly in the franco-phone literature about Madagascar. I would cite Eugene Mangalaza (1980), and Sophie Goedefroit (1996) “ *Car ta case se situe au bord de la forêt, à la lisière de l’humanité*” ([Goedefroit 1998], p.40) as examples of analyses whose terms influenced me strongly during my fieldwork.

However by talking to other scholars back in Europe and by acquainting myself with English language literature on the subject, I realized that the views held by franco-phone authors may be too limited. I had to adopt a wider focus, for viewing everything through over the forest-village opposition would have led to missing important aspects of the general picture. The time of observation was too short but I think that the scarcity of occasion where I could collect comments that really mentioned the word «the forest», is a clear indicator that I am on the right path, and there is evidence of the accuracy of my theoretical frame in the following chapters. There are several emic concepts relevant to the act of bringing order for viewing space. I restrict myself to this study on the important ones for my argument because a general description would

go behind the outline of this text.

In order to understand the appreciated aspects by the Malagasy of this «mark» on the land more precisely we need another concept, one that clarifies the visual aspect of change, the value and beauty seen in it and explains, why open space is more valued and credited as a mark then for example fruit trees or forest. I had the opportunity to work on the cultivation site of the *fokontany* president of the village. While ferociously chipping at small bushes he asked me if I did something similar in Switzerland. I said yes, I did while working with peasants. I told him that we also clear the ground around for example fruit bearing trees, or around trees whose growth we want to enhance. Here, he answered proudly, we cut everything down; there will be no tree left. When I asked other cultivators about their cultivation practices I received the similar answers. They will cut down all trees because they block the light on their cultivations. The fields singled out to me as the most well prepared for cultivation were the ones where even the dried tree stumps had been dug out. The ideal seemed to be a, flat field without any vegetation left and fully exposed to the sunlight, transforming the obscuring and sometimes oppressive and menacing forest into a site of blazing sunshine. This opposition is not only true for the cultivations; it is also imperative for the village. In Soatany the change is very sudden, as one steps out of the thick canopy of a small forest into the light of the open village, undisturbed and cleaned of any ground vegetation. So the clearing of the ground is a basic condition for all cultivation. Cleared ground is a precondition of culture, whether it consists of rice, maize or, in a metaphorical sense, the family and even the ancestors. Without unhampered insolation, cultivation will have no success.

A basic concept for many places in Madagascar ([Keller 2004], p.101) for the visual aspects in the environment is the concept of *mazava* (clarity, light) and its oppose: *maizina* (darkness, ignorance, evil forces). It has been described by Maurice Bloch in “People into Places: Zafimaniry Concepts of Clarity” (1996), and further elaborated by Eva Keller: “Towards Complete Clarity: Bible Study Among Seventh Day Adventists in Madagascar” (2004). ²Keller explains that *Mazava* can be understood as an optical phenomenon. It concerns luminosity and transparency: where there is light one can see and distinguish different features. This leads to the metaphorical way of understanding *mazava*, that only while being able to see the important things one can make sense of them. Comprehension of circumstances and situations is only possible where there is illumination. Obscurity obstructs understanding. By light break one can see with ones eyes but also with one’s intellect. *Mazava* carries the mystic connotation of the purity of the divine and of the meaning of live. As such *mazava* has its darker counterpart: *maizina* the disturbing feeling of being lost or the perception of hidden meaning just beyond ones grasp, the lack of understanding and of things that are not making sense ([Keller 2004], p.101).

The idea of clarity has a second connotation, it relates to the third dimension in space, to height. The two aspects are complementing each other here with clarity improving with altitude, the higher up a place is situated, the greater is the promise to have an

²I thank Eva Keller for suggesting this to me

even better view over the land. The perception of places ranked by perceived elevation implies a more metaphorical description of social hierarchies. The perceived altitude of a place is dependent of the people staying there. So the responsible for the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust projects says, that he is «going down» to the village of Soatany to inspect the communal forest. In spite of the fact that there is no difference in altitude between his starting point; the coastal city of Morondava and the village of Soatany. I found the same notion in the text of Gillian Feeley-Harnik, “ (...) *From these high light clearings in which people cultivated their generation they descended (nijots) to the surrounding area where the garden and rice field are located, which were described as being «in the woods»(an aty ala) whether or not the surrounding area was acutely lower or forested*” ([Feeley-Harnik 1991], p.159). The perceived altitude of a place is dependent of the people staying there. The village is employed as the point of reference for altitude and for cleared ground. Every other place is measured in relation to this benchmark. In this sense we should also understand the comment of the wife of the *fokontany* president of Soatany when she says that “*Marofandilia* (the next village in the northwest) *is an’ala* [in the woods]”. It means that they are not as civilized as we are, they haven’t made the step of development out of the forest into a clear, proper village. In the same sense Tahiry, my translator, who lived as a student in the capital, consulated me “*you know we are an’ala here*” as I was complaining to him about the shower without proper enclosure in Soatany.

Gillian Feeley-Harnik sees this contrast between high and low, cleared and uncleared as such an important concept of the environment for the Sakalava that it is even observed in the course of the installation of the tombs: “*In all these instances the clearing is preparatory to planting something that will grow: people, crops, ancestors*” ([Feeley-Harnik 1991], p.533). Clarity and cultivation are connected as a mutual reinforcing pair crowned by altitude.

To this vertical division in two strata, is added a division of the horizontal space in the four directions (*zorontany* [*zorontany* Malagasy off.]): north (*avaratse* [*avaratra* Malagasy off.]), east (*antinana* [*antsinanana*]) south (*atime* [*antimo*]) and west (*andrefa* [*andrefana*]). This vision of a spreading of space in this four central direction is used by all systems of representation. In the village of Soatany all the houses are roughly the same size and all follow an east-west orientation. The four central directions are always taken in consideration when one is organizing oneself in space. The west is reserved for the most important person during meals and reunions. The sons construct their houses ideally in the east of the one of their parents. The toilet place is normally found on a *monka* (spent land) in the east, outside the village. Generally indications of placements and general orientation are always given in reference to the cardinal directions. We again find the reference to clarity in this system of directions: east is associated with clarity, sunshine in the morning. “*Significantly there is a central rite that should occur at dawn when the rising sun makes the village «clear* »”(Bloch 1996, p. 69).

Summarizing the important points, to use the concept of landscape in this context is misleading. The concept is strongly biased by western construction of a «picturesque» view and misses the crucial ideas for the Malagasy. Land appeals to Malagasy because of its potential for transformation into homesteads. The attraction is the chal-

lenge of exposing oneself to the rough forces of life itself in order to gain a connection to the land. The ultimate aim is to anchor oneself by one's own forces to the land. This perception of land as a resource, as an opportunity is reinforced by the concept of clarity. Clarity comes about by bright open spaces, unobstructed views and the illumination of understanding by observing situations in clear daylight. Thereby altitude, being aloof, enhances the capability of perception. The village is the point of reference and every other place is judged in relation to it. Space is perceived and inhabited in relation to the four cardinal directions of the compass.

The transformation of the land is a sign of a successful kin group in expansion. It is important to be part in a «process of growth» as it is described by Eva Keller (2008). This «process of growth» as we will see in the next chapter is one of the triggers of the tendency to keep moving, to leave a secure village and to head for the challenge and social prestige a new homestead brings. It is one of the reasons for the great amounts of internal migration.

2.3 *Monkas/ Hatsake* (spent land/ cultivation sites)

How can these concepts from the theoretical chapter help us to explain the local situation? Where is this process of «transformation of the land» palpable in Soatany? For this I decided to use the often used expression «open-land» and «used-land» in Soatany. Because this notion marks the fine line of the «transformation» from forest to agricultural land. What can the notion «open-land» and «used-land» tell us about the local representation of the environment?

In Soatany the sites where the clearing of new fields is going on, or where they are already planted are both called *hatsake* in the local language. They consist of former forest, or former *monka* land. Because the status of *moka/hatsake* has an imprecise definition, it stood in the center of many discussions about what is forest and what is not. This difference implies also incompatible view on ownership and right of cultivation. This is also one of the reasons, as we will see further on, of many local disputes based on the ambiguous classification. It was also the core of the confrontation with the NGO «Fanamby», an environment project who uses a Western definition of forest.

The usual cash crops planted on this sites are maize or peanuts with some melons or beans for consumption. (Rice cultivation and lowland gardens enter a different category.) After about three years the site is abandoned, and the land is not cultivated any more. For some years it can be used as a pasture ground for *Zebus*, but as more and more bushes and small trees are appearing the land becomes *monka*. Which signifies land that has once been forest *ala be*, was then cleared and cultivated for a certain period and is now locked in an in-between stage, either to be cultivated again after an interval of about ten years or let to return to its original status as forest.

That *monka* and the *hatsake* do not belong to the confines of the village space can

be shown by the example of the village fraction called Fenomaro. A member of the Antandroy ethnic living in this hamlet died. Because of this death this part of Soatany was not to be visited by any outsiders who were not part of the family of the deceased. To visit the inhabitants of Fenomaro while they were working on their hatsake on the other hand was not a problem, on the contrary, it was even welcomed.

With the clearing of land and its preparation for cultivation it also enters into cycle of ownership.³ The first to start cultivating at a certain site is also considered as the owner of the land. A young man in the village was very upset because another villager had started to cut down trees on the land he claimed was the land of his wife's family. Cutting down the trees on «his land» was perceived by him as an attempt to claim his land.

As long as the land remains under cultivation, its ownership is clear and visible for all. The owner is present and can be associated with the land on a daily basis. Once cultivation is shifted to another place, and the land is let in fallow, the concept of ownership becomes more loose. As the land becomes *monka*, everybody is now allowed to let his *zebus* graze. All the *monka* inside the village territory are open for the owners of *Zebus*. (Only outsiders have to ask for permission.) But the rights to restore a certain *monka* back to cultivation land theoretically remain with its first occupant.

In another context, the villagers refer to the forest and use the term *ala* when they are really talking about a site classified as *monka*. For example my host mother did so when she told me, that her husband was *an'ala* to search for the firewood, when in reality he collected it from the *monka*. Or in another case, the mother of Emanuelle told me, that Papa Emanuelle was *an'ala* when he was working on his *hatsake*. I would argue that *hatsake/monka* is a territory in between the two categories, not forest any more but not village space either. It does not really belong to the category forest because it was or actually is cultivated and as a cultivation site, it has an official owner, even though this ownership is understood differently than the one of a village parcel or a rice paddy. However it retains certain similarities with the a forest as access is not easy, first because one deliberately builds up a barrier against the *Zebus* to protect the cultivation site and second because one of the first plants growing on the *hatsake* site is the jujube (*Ziziphus mauritania*), a bush barbed with spikes. It actually is very effective against trespassers. This fast appearing plants are also taking the land back into the shadily sphere of the forest marge.

³The heir of the land is its guardian; his duty is to pass it on to his successors in an understanding similar to the Anglo-Saxon concept of stewardship. Emmanuel Fauroux (2000) explains it "l'homme ne peut jamais s'approprier vraiment la forêt. Au mieux, il peut devenir le dépositaire d'un droit limité dans le temps et dans l'espace" ([Fauroux 2000], p.155).

2.4 Focusing on the forest

The local expression for forest is *ala* in Soatany. There is also an the expression used to refer to «deep forest», which is *ala be* (*be* is used as a suffix for amplification lit.: big forest). *Ala be* implies a course of extension, unusualness and exceptionality. On the village territory of Soatany *ala be* is a site to the north of the village about two hours within walking distance from the village center. It is not a place where you go often.

While doing my field work, I was very frustrated that I heard no exciting stories about the forest. At the time I wrote in my notebook; ” *here are no forest stories, no stories about glorious adventures to the dark heart of the unknown* ”. Back home browsing through my notebook I suddenly realized that Soatany is one big story about the forest. The village itself is a tale about what can be created at the junction of human enterprise and the opportunity provided by a forest. By looking at the transformed land, the story about the transformation of a particular environmental setting, of *ala be* , into a prospering human settlement can be read. Everything that exists today has been created in the time since the first settlers arrived here. It is a proud story about how the people living here now and their ancestors before them have successfully made this transformation happen. The story is not finished yet, which makes it difficult to tell, as the creation of Soatany is still an ongoing process. When talking about cultivation sites, about their achievements, the people of Soatany often exclaims ” *the land is still vast around the village* ”. This means that the people feel that they have not yet realized the full potential of the land. There is still a lot of work to be done, the struggle of conquest of the land is still going on, the phase of installing itself on the land is not over yet. There are still things to achieve before they are ready to enter the final phase of anchoring.

As I described in the introduction to this chapter it becomes clear that the attitude towards the forest of the people of rural Madagascar has nothing in common with our modern western conservationist outlook. Forest is a good thing because it is an opportunity, a possible site of transformation, of leaving one’s mark on the land. As massive the transformation achieved, as big the fame of the one that did the feat and as eternal will the mark be that he left. Furthermore forested land provides good cultivation sites, it guaranties a successful harvest on already fertilized earth. The one who seizes it first can face the challenge of “«*opening up the land*» ([Wooley 2002]p.47). *He can prove that he is worthy of getting in contact with the force of creation, the pure force of the land.* ([Wooley 2002]p.47)

Forest is still «vast», «virgin», a land full of potential still untouched. *Ala be*, the forest is furthermore a site of opportunity, a promise for the future where one can go to clear away the trees for the plantations of tomorrow. I heard often, ” *it is good to keep the forest for our descendents*”. Not for safekeeping it on behalf of it is beauty or the animals living inside, but to have land to be passed on to future generations, as described in the «process of growth».

Ala be is understood as *tany fivelômana*, an expression meaning «land for the future generations». *Tany fivelômana* can have different meanings (Keller 2008) and may be

translated as «land for subsistence» or land where people create a livelihood or «land that enables life» (Keller 2008, p.47). But the idea of guarding this land for the future generation is not connected to the thought that there would come a time when there might not be enough for everybody. Nobody feels the kind of «ecological panic» (as Bloch calls it) common in the west towards the forest. It is more the idea of a well stocked larder, for the future. For today it is like a supermarket free for everybody to help oneself to a serving of the *tavolo*, *trandrakys* and the *tantely* (honey) to be found there. Furthermore, the forest as a place of opportunity and subsistence becomes most importance for those on the margins of the social hierarchy of the village.

The young nephew of *Iaban'I' Emanuelle* hesitates taking us along onto hunting *trandraky* because he feared that it would be too much for a *vazaha* (foreigner) to walk inside the forest. It was explained to me that for the hunt you have to go to *ala be* where you have to kneel and bend a lot under trees and branches, and find our way where there is no path. The concept of forest stands for a hoard of a lot of obstacles: still the untamed, difficult to access, lacking clarity, no easy traveling. Once inside the forest one loses the bearings because of all the plants obstructing sight and passage. The forest *ala be* that the people in Soatany talk about is for them the opposite of the ordered and illuminated village space, the dangerous antisocial countryside. It is where daring men face the bare forces of *zanahary* without the shelter of the ancestors. As the father of the *fokontany* president told me, " *si on fait quelque chose de «mal» dans la forêt on va être attaqué par les bibi [les animaux] de la forêt.*" Inside the village law and order reigns and animals only interfere when bewitched by a malignant healer were as outside, as this reference suggests justice is left over to the law of nature.

Chapter 3

Migration

3.1 Why is the theme of migration important?

Why is an understanding of the issue of internal migration in Madagascar of importance for an analysis of the perception of the forest in the Menabe region? Madagascar is a country with a relatively high and sustained growth in population ¹. An important number of young people are trying to carve out a place for their own subsistence. "The Malagasy societies, perhaps more so than many others, are fundamentally dynamic and «moving forwards »" ([Keller 2008], forthcoming). People find themselves trying to get ahead in the rush to the new «land where there is space» (*tany malalaka*). The expansion of a kin group often results in a shortage of land. This pushes some of its members to a search for new ground (citeKeller 08 , forthcoming). Other reasons, such as the growing aridity of the land in the south ([Goedefroit 1998], p.70) amplify the phenomenon and force even settled groups to compete for the last available territories. As said above the Menabe region has been a destination for internal migration for a long time ([Bourdieu 1980], p.133). The village of Soatany itself was the outcome of the aggregation of several successive migrations movements that took place from about the 1920s onwards. The history of the village is made up by a series of migrations and each wave of people that arrived from somewhere else left its mark on the land and added to the diversity of the inhabitants. The story of migration will only come to an end with the final step of rootage, when the former immigrants decide not to send their dead to their distant homeland anymore, but to build their tombs here and with this act finally become natives of the land.

Migration is a theme that is very present and debated in a lively manner in Soatany. During my absence from the village between January 2007 and August 2007, several new families came to live in the village. These immigrants were trying to eke out a living. This induced an increased pressure on local cultivable land. But the good and even the suitable cultivation sites had been divided up between the long established families of the village for a number of generations. The high demand brought the «unspent» land and foremost the remaining forests into the range of vision. New arrivals

¹The World Bank estimates Madagascar's population growth rate at 2,7% in 2006. www.worldbank.org [visited 26.5.09].

always bring up the question of the distribution of land among the inhabitants of the village. Should the last reserves that remain in the domain of the village be given to the newcomers, or is it wiser to keep it safeguarded as a resource for one's own descendants? Who is constructing the land? Who has the power to decide? How is this map of rights, options and duties spread out over the terrain perceived by the new arrivals on one hand and by the villagers on the other?

In this section, I will analyze the different strategies to obtain and retain cultivable land. My goal is to use this land politics to demonstrate the relations of power within the village. In the constellation between the first arrivals and the latecomers the forest represents the promise of a opportunity for social mobility on the part of immigrants and is at the same time imagined as *tany fivelômana* (land for subsistence or land where people create a livelihood, land that enables life) (Abinal & Malzac 1993, p.824, in Keller: 2008, forthcoming), and as insurance for the future of their children by the local residents.

I would like to show how this rising demand on cultivable land is actually managed in the village of Soatany. My interest lies in the way the distribution of land is handled and what kind of internal dynamic this creates.

Soatany is still caught in an ongoing process of conquest. The village history is short and most of the inhabitants are still on the brink of performing that last step of anchorage to the land.

3.2 Migration in the Menabe region

The Menabe region has been populated by different groups, coming from all over Madagascar. They merged and finally formed the Sakalava kingdom in the 17th century ([Cabalar 1996], [Pollini 2007]). The Sakalava kingdom was built to a large part by immigrants belonging to the ethnic group of the Maroserana, that moved in from the south of the island. Other families from the south and the middle-eastern part of Madagascar joined them, and were assimilated into the Sakalava kingdom. The newly constituted ethnic group of the Sakalava built their livelihood on mixture of cattle (*zebu*) husbandry and subsistence agriculture.

The *zebus* are not only of economic importance; the oxen especially also have an important part in rituals to worship the ancestors. They are scarified in complex and colorful ceremonies. ” *Cattle are critical not just because wealth is generally stored in them (they are walking savings accounts and accepted currency in a world without banks) but also because they are the ideal sacrificial offering at life-cycle rituals, such as those undertaken for circumcision, marriage and death. Cattle are not just an alternative to money, they are special symbolic objects to be used in specific, culturally sanctioned ways* ” ([Wooley 2002], p.127).

In the beginning of the 19th century, the Sakalava, kingdom was conquered by the Merina, an ethnic group descending from the highlands around the capital city of Antananarivo ([Cabalar 1996], p.15). The Merina installed garnisons and an adminis-

tration to control the area. The presence of these Merina soldiers allowed new groups of migrants to make their way down from the highlands, stemming mostly from the Bet-sileo ethnic group. They came with the aim of cultivating rice in the fluvial marshlands.

The French annexed Madagascar as a colony in 1895. In the Menabe region they maintained the Merina administration when they were extending colonial rule over this part of Madagascar some years after taking possession. The presence of the French slowed down the migratory movement from the south but was encouraged people from the east and the center of Madagascar to move to the Menabe region, with noticeable peaks of new settlements in the year of 1915 up to 1920 ([Goedefroit 1998], p.93). About 15 years later a second wave of migrants from the same origins followed and this time Antandroy pastoralists also from the south joined them. These pioneer Antandroy established the Menabe as a destination for migration in their ethnic group. Another important group, regionally known as the Karan, came over from Bombay and installed themselves in the region of the coastal town Morondava around 1897 ([Goedefroit 1998], p.94). Today they predominate in trade and commerce ([Cabalzar 1996], p.17). Madagascar finally regained independence in 1960 and the French administration left the area we are concerned with. A few French settlers remained in the region, mostly in Morondava and some even returned after independence and settled again.

As a result of this history, the region of Menabe has a very diverse ethnic composition. According to Le Bourdiac (1980, p. 134), the region of Central Menabe, like the whole west coast of Madagascar, remains a preferred destination of internal migration. A common ideal image claims that young men should gain experience away from their ancestral lands and come back only after they have made a fortune. Furthermore internal migration is forced by demographic pressure in overpopulated regions and by the degradation of the ecosystem caused by extensive slash and burn agriculture. People move into the still relatively intact Menabe area in search of land for cultivation.

As we have seen in the chapter above, the challenge to establish oneself in «new»land is part of the «process»of growth”. ” *Tsy tany mandeha, fô olon belo* (it is not land that moves, but people) ”, *one of the most cited of proverbs, means, in part, that unlike the constancy of land, people do not remain the same when they move* ” ([Lambeck and Walsh 1980], p.317). It means that people have something to gain from moving towards new opportunities. ” *They do not give up those aspects of their identities constituted by the movement, in turn, of their ancestors, but they also accede to the customs of the new place. Continuity is anchored in the land and the marks that the ancestors leave on it: history is made by movement across it. Movement introduces diversity and accreditation of personal practice*” (Bloch 1971 in [Lambeck and Walsh 1980], p.317).

The settlement of migrants in a radically different ecological and social environment displays adaptive features. The first groups integrated themselves into the local Sakalava social system and adopted its culture. The former Merina, Bestsilo and Antesaka migrants have now their burial grounds in the local soil, they have become indistinguishable from the original population and designate themselves as Sakalava. The groups that moved in, after the colonial period, however, kept themselves apart and

still move back to their ancestral lands to bury their dead ([Bourdieu 1980], p.136). The situation is characterized by a multitude of possible ethnic affiliations. The boundaries between the different groups are relatively open and identities seem to be overlapping. The Menabe is a very dynamic region, people are arriving with their own practices but at the same time adopting the features given by the land.

3.3 Soatany

As mentioned above the village of Soatany was founded in about 1920 by Antesaka immigrants coming from the southern part of Madagascar. At this time, a saw mill operated in Marofandilia (the next village in the northwest), and most of the timber it needed was extracted in the region where the village of Soatany is now situated. Some of the workers hired for timber extraction decided to settle in the place of their former work. At the time, the river Tomitsy still conducted so much water that it was possible to install rice paddies on the riverbanks. In 1959, the river Tomitsy dried out ([Gemini 1996]) and the village center was moved more to the north as the inhabitants started to invest their work more in swidden land cultivation than in rice.

Most of the people living in the village center today consider themselves to be part of the Antesaka ethnic group. A few see themselves in the line of the founder family, but have arrived later in the village, or even have joined members of their extended family already living there. The village is also home to some people who are members of the Antanosy ethnic group. The Sakalava, the ancient ethnic group of the Menabe region, are left very few but as they also migrated to Soatany and have no important role in the foundation of the village, they have no significant authority inside the village today. According to the explanation of the village president, the village hamlets founded later on by more recently arrived Antandroy immigrants.

With a few exceptions ², the Antandroy and the Antesaka do not live together in the village compound, but in separated settlements. The Antesaka live in the village center, where two water pumps ³ are installed and the school⁴ is situated. The Antandroy mostly live in the two hamlets outside the village, here there are now public services. In this the hamlets the water is pulled out of well with a bucket. The children have to walk one hour to the school in the village center, and no NGO-project cars pass by this side of the village.

3.4 Village hierarchies

In this section, I will concentrate on the expressions of power connected with the distribution of land. I want to understand the grasp some families seem to have on territory

²I will explain in more detail the relation between the two ethnic groups below

³Installed by a Japanese development project

⁴Installed by SAHA, a national rural development project supported by the Swiss DDC

and resources. In the middle of the Soatany village center there is an unkempt place of about five hundred square meters, where plants and trees grow totally undisturbed, like anywhere else in the village. The houses are built at a certain distance from this place and only a small footpath passes through the grass just evading the last tree. No *zebus* graze there, no adults can be seen sitting in the shadows of the trees, nor children playing there; it is a real «no-man's-land» in the middle of the village. The reason is that the village center of Soatany is split in two. Undistinguishable from an outsider's perspective, it consists of two spreading clusters founded and claimed by different families and of several unrelated newcomers. One family settled more in the north of the village, the other settled more in the south. In the middle is this place that works as a barrier. In the polarity of the two founding families, the space between has become important, a field of tension and a space of two opposing forces.

This place is called *Tohin-Tana* (lit. articulation-village). It is said to be inhabited by spirits. It is important to note that spirits do need a connection to the living to be beneficial to the village. The legend goes that the founder of the village interacted with these spirits by the means of a certain ceremony with the aim of making all official visitors, like as example the army or the police and nowadays even the people from the NGO's and the environmental compliance, officers well disposed toward the village. This quote from Jennifer Cole (2001) illustrates how the attendance of such special places is important: " *It is as if human attention alone makes power benevolent, some people I know claimed that pieces of land or even old standing stones that were not cared for anymore become cruel* " ([Cole 2001], p.140).

One family claims that only the deceased founder of the village and a still living elder of their line owned the rights to do this ceremony because they had started to perform it together. But as the owner is dead and this grandfather has left the village, this leaves the father of the actual president of the village as the *lunaky* (the oldest living person with rights towards all ceremonies). He is the heir of the ceremonies connected to that place and as such he directs their enacting. This direct link to the founder of the most important ceremonies performed in the village gives the family of the *fokon-tany* president a strong position inside the village.

Gillian Freely-Harnik (1991) describes the relation existing between the first settlers and the trees connected to them: " *The trees associated with first settlers and others claims to land are not only «places of remembering»(tany fahatsianrovana) and «asking»(fangatahana), they are the geopolitical centers of communities organized around alternative ideas about land, labor and political loyalty; they are the creative outcome of those alternative relations* " ([Feely-Harnik 1991], p. 34). Further on she explains the importance that lies in the connection with such a place. Possessing the knowledge of the first settlers of the village guarantees to its holder a position of power inside the village: " *The descendant of the first ones to «break open the land for planting»(mamaky tany) was recognized lunaky (the oldest living person with rights towards all ceremonies), in contrast to the Vahiny or stranger who followed after. The status of tompon-tany was marked by the presence of their ancestor's tombs. Tompon-tany held the best land, well watered and close to the village, while strangers had to negotiate with them for what remained* " ([Feely-Harnik 1991], p. 159). *Mamaky tany*

and *tompon-tany* are thus two connected systems of respect. The person clearing the land becomes first a *mamaky tany* and he can move on to become a *tompon-tany* when he succeeds in moving the place of burial for his group to the new site.

In Soatany (as I was informed in the short time I was there) there is no *tompon-tany-family*⁵. That would mean that no family has made the last step of anchorage into the ground, and constructed their tombs on the edge of the village. The graveyard of the village is called graveyard of *vahinis* (lit. guests, visitors, strangers) – it still is the custom to remove the body of the deceased several months after the burial and bring him to his original *Tjanindrazana* (locality of the family tomb) in the south.

Although the process of anchorage to the land has yet led to the establishment of a *tompon-tany family*, there are preeminent families in the village. Two major families face each other in a standoff. One has a huge estate in the north of the village, the other one owns an equally large plot in the south. The two families seem to have found a system of alternation in occupying the official power position of the *fokontany* president. One of the reasons for this I believe is based on the fact that the former village president was a member of the opposite family. Nevertheless it could be argued that the family of the actual village president has a more explicit claim to the land on which the village stands. This is because of the grandfather who chairs all the important ceremonies on the village *Tohin-Tana*. ” (...) *All the dead are powerful, but only ancestors hold legitimate authority over the living. Only those who ruled are so treated. Likewise, not all a person's dead ascendants are propitiated as «ancestors» only those ascendants who held important positions of authority in life. Those who in their lifetime deliberately looted authority, ancestral custom (such as sorcerers or witches) never acquire the status of ancestor. The fact of having «ancestors» not merely dead forebears, is the paramount sign of authority among the living* ” ([Feely-Harnik 1978], p.408).

The position of the *fokontany* president as the representative of the legal power of the village implies important advantages. He is the official judge on the village level in all disputes taking place in the zone of his competence especially in disputes about land. Being *fokontany*-president also gives the holder of the office the advantage of having all organizations coming into the village pass by his place. He is the first to learn of all the new initiatives and has the chance to use them to further his interests. So it is no coincidence that the younger brother of the *fokontany*-president is president of the local forest association. As we will see in the next chapter, this has an important influence on the repartition of the communal lands.

What is valid for organizations also holds true for individuals: for example, the *fokontany*-president is the first address a newcomer is directed to. He is thus informed about any arrivals. Everybody coming to Soatany ask him about a place to stay and land to farm. ” *When somebody new comes to the village he goes see the president with his «certificate de residence» and it is the president who presents the newcomer to everybody on the next reunion, with the intention that everybody is informed about his arrival into village. Concerning the cultures, the newcomer will ask the president*

⁵translation lit. master of the land

where there would be a place for him to start cultivation. Then the president takes him on a tour and shows him the land (abandoned monkas that are still numerous around the village), his duty is to deforest them and make an enclosure so as not to take a risk with the oxen farmers in the village ” (wife of the *fokontany* president 15.11. 2007). What happens to all newcomers also happened to me as, I ended up pitching my tent in the backyard of the president’s house during my stay in Soatany.

However, the position of the village president is also a difficult one because he has to arbitrate between two interests. On one hand the newcomers arrive in the village in hope of a new land to cultivate on the other, the village families see the land as *tany fivelômana*, land to guard for their descendants. There is a palpable tension between the villagers and newcomers, the often expressed along the ethnic lines. The Antesaka, the Antanosy, and the ethnic group of the Sakalava live in the village center. A migrant able to identify with one of these ethnic groups can most of the time also claim to relate somehow to one of the already established families and as such to be not a «real» stranger. This demonstrates a short joking discussion between a member of the of the Antesaka ethnic group and of the Antandroy ethnic group living in the village center, that took place during the construction of a wooden box for the *Vangoindrano* ceremony,

A: ” *Tu vas faire où ta cérémonie- tu n’est pas d’ici toi- si tu meurs, tu vas faire la cérémonie ici ou ailleurs?* C: *On va la faire dans la monka!* B: *Je vais faire la cérémonie ici.* A: *Ha, non, tu viens d’ailleurs tu ne vas pas faire la cérémonie ici!* B: *Pourquoi tu me dis ça , à moi? Il y a d’ autres ethnies ici, pourquoi tu ne leurs dis pas ça à elles?”* The Antandroy are considered as the egoistic profiteer of the *tany fivelôana* (land to guard for the descendants) of the others. They just come for a little while, profiting as much as possible from the land, harvesting out as much as possible and then leave again back to their native land in the south. This is the image the villagers in the center of Soatany have about the hamlets, an unstable dynamic mass of arrivals and departures without any connection to the land. Arriving Atandroy thus face the strongest opposition, first by the people living in the center, but also by the inhabitants of the hamlets, as they come into a situation on the fringe where resources are already scarce. As the *fokontany* president of Soatany said: ” *Les nouveaux mettent leur Zebus dans les monkas (spent land) Soatany - après peu de temps, ils commencent à voler – je vais annoncer à la radio que nous n’accepterons plus ça. Ils veulent, ils brûlent les maisons des autres, la sécurité est très mauvaise* ”.

The issue of new people coming to live in the village space exists also in many other parts of Madagascar⁶. Below I present some examples of land acquisition that I investigated during my stay in Soatany. Probably there are many more categories and subtleties in the distribution of land that I did not capture in my short stay. And of

⁶There is a good example of the strategies enacted by the established groups towards those newcomers in Evers (2002). She has done research for ten years in a Betsileo village in the highlands of Madagascar. There, several *tompontany* families maintained their land monopoly against an incoming flow of newcomers with the installation of a cast system. Later, a change of paradigm caused by new economic circumstances made them opt for classes instead of casts. Thus social mobility became possible and the system was transformed into a more dynamic one.

course my analysis cannot be as profound as the one that Sandra Evers achieved by spending more than ten years in Madagascar for her fieldwork. My intention is to show how difficult it is for somebody not directly connected to or a member of one of the major families to get access to cultivable land as the distribution of land and the representations of forest are very much linked with each other.

3.5 Gaining access to real estate: structures and strategies

In 1896, Madagascar became a French Protectorate. Immediately after taking possession the French Department of Agriculture sent a mission to the island. With the task to create a Forest Service. In 1900, a first forest decree was issued, followed by a second in 1913 and a third in 1930. The last in this series of law though modified is still valid at present ([Pollini 2007], p.74). This legislation lays the foundation for what is to be taken as forest and how it is to be treated. Before the arrival of the French there was no legal distinction of land covered with forest and agricultural land.

At the end of the 1980s Madagascar established a “National Environmental Action Plan” (NEAP). It was supported in this venture by the World Bank and other foreign investors⁷. The implementation of the NEAP the creation of a specialized «Département des Eaux et Forêts». This new institution was conceived to be independent from other government services and run on a separate budget. Since then the forest service is responsible for all state forests. Muttenger claims that the forest service and all the legislation related to it were based on a western ideology of a separation between forest and agricultural land. He insists that this is one of the reasons why the forests designated by the state are still contested on terms of land rights (2006, p.83).

All the areas designated as forests are owned by the state. The Département des Eaux et Forêts is the public body enforcing the state rule over these territories. It is an administrative structure and an agency of law enforcement at the same time. “*L’Etat est le seul représentant de la puissance publique en matière forestière. De plus il peut agir à titre de propriétaire forestier, ou encore en tant que régisseur des forêts qui n’appartiennent pas à des propriétaires privés ou publics autres que l’Etat*” ([Muttenger Frank 2006], p. 83).

Soatany has officially the status of a *fokontany* (the smallest administrative unit in Madagascar, SAHA document 2001), but it was founded somewhere after 1900 on land classified as forest. Technically the whole village is thus built on ground that belongs to the state. But it has established after 1900 on forest ground. Legally all forest ground is property of the state. This fact illustrates the virtual distinction between cultivation land and forest. To maintain the place where Soatany stands inside the forest perimeter shows the complete ignorance of the actual situation in the village by

⁷see also chapter 3

the state.

Muttenzer claims that the basic principle in Malagasy custom, that the one who deforests an area becomes also the rightful owner (chapter 2) is consciously ignored by the administration. " *La culture sur brûlis défriché appelée tavy en malgache constitue non seulement un mode d'exploitation agricole des terres mais aussi un mode traditionnel d'acquisition de la propriété foncière coutumière*" (2006, p. 30). Nobody in Soatany holds an official land title as this would be impossible under the current legal status of the land. In this situation of insecurity and illegality the parallel structure of local custom and patrimonial relations ([Chabal 1999], p.15) are filling the gap but conflicts arise when individual ownership is claimed and the first arrivals try to defend their prerogatives against migrants. The absence of a clear and guaranteed system of land ownership is most crucially felt in the negotiations between the different conservation oriented NGO's and the villagers. The local actors are left with an insecure status and claims that can not be backed up by legal documents.

But I think the interpretation of Frank Muttenzer is too prerogative and simplistic as many factors have changed and the local residents have to deal ever more with outsiders and NGO's who claim to enforce state law and stand outside the network of clientelism and corruption. His view of the situation is exemplified by the following citation: " *Les Africains et Malgaches ont, dès la période coloniale, développés une capacité spécifique de penser le fait administratif et une culture particulière traduisant une conception originale du pouvoir: contournement et détournement des règles, refus de s'insérer dans les structures officielles, activités informelles parallèles fondées sur des relations de clientèle*" (2007, p.84). In former times the locals had only to deal with the forest service, which could be corrupted and manipulated. The Département des Eaux et Forêts was and still is accessible for influences and bribes by at least the wealthier of the villagers. Nowadays the NGO's concerned with forest conservation not only replace the state as the perceived owner of the forest space but they also take over the law enforcement in the territory they claim.

We will see in the next chapter that the official approach towards communal land rights took an ideological turn towards a certain idea of trying to integrate local custom into state law.

Since the first settlers came to Soatany an itemized communal memory of claims to cultivable land inside the village territory exists. The map I made shows that the land suitable for plantation (actual *monkas/hatsake* and old *monkas*) is already divided among the families installed in the village for a long time. Newcomers have to develop different strategies to get a share of fertile land. All these strategies involve resources of the one or other kind, or the commitment to future obligations towards one of the older families.

These strategies illustrate the relations of power in Soatany. The marginalization of the weakest group, the newcomers, has to be understood in order to see to which extent the existence of «forest» can be perceived by them as a «solution» to escape their dependence. Only by clearing forest and then claiming the newly created spaces as their own will they stand the chance of a rise in their social position.

As I will demonstrate that this is an everyday topic of discussion in Soatany. My

interest is in the way the persons living inside the village deal with this conflict. First it is important to state that this is to be looked at as a dynamic situation and not a static one.

As already explained in the chapter on the perception of land, especially because this perception is a social construction, it is constantly rebuilt and readapted. Pressures stemming from disputes and changing power relations inside the village but also from outside influences impede on the designation of areas. It is important to understand social structure and to know the main actors. One has to look at their arguments and their representations to get an idea of the actual social construction of the forest in Soatany.

3.5.1 Inside the family

Inside the extended family it is quite common to ask the wealthier members for the right to cultivate an old *monka* (spent land). The wife of the *fokontany* president explained to me the expected way to ask for land with the example of an old *monka* not far away from the village center. This *monka* has not been cultivated for about twenty years. During this time, several huge Tamarin trees have grown on there. The family of the president lent this *monka* to the family of the president's nephew (the son of the father's cousin).

It was Mama Emanuelle, the wife of the nephew, who came to the house of the president to do the proper asking. The president was absent at that time, so it was the president's wife who chaired the discussion and finally took the decision to accept the demand. To grant the land to this relative also gave an advantage to the president. As the president himself is planning to cultivate his crops on an adjacent plot, the allocation to his nephew would eliminate the need to build a fence against the divagating zebus himself. Even more appreciated was the fact that Papa Emanuelle had a reputation as big hunter and was in possession of a rifle. He would kill the wild pigs that tend to devastate the fields and so the family of the president would benefit in two ways.

This is also the area whose clearing sparked a conflict between the villagers and the Fanamby-organization. By bringing in new stakeholders the risks in this conflict can also be shared among a bigger group. Papa Emanuelle asked for the use of this land because he wanted a cultivation site near the school. He owns land himself on the other side of the river tomitsy. But doing his planting there would mean that he would become locked there for months at a time because the river cannot be crossed in the rainy season. This would preclude him from fulfilling his teaching duties. The land is in this way «given» out to a more or less distant member of the family. The wife of the *fokontany* president told me what was expected by such a deal: " *Je souhaite qu'elle [Mama Emanuelle qui a fait la demande] donne un peu d'argent en retour. Mais elle fait comme elle veut. Mais si elle fait cela, elle est gentille.*" Within the family, you can always expect that your demand for a share of cultivable *monka* will be accepted. To give some payment in return is optional but encouraged (as the malagassy proverb says *atero ka alao* - giving to take after). Evers describes this case in her village: "

If one member of an incoming household could prove he was related to a topontany family, the other members qualified as topontany in the eyes of the villager. They could enter the family compound of the topontany family leader and were offered land for cultivation. (...). When family members join us, we have to give them land as well since they are family. What will be left of our land after a few generations if we have to divide it between more and more people? A member of the topontany family complains. ” ([Evers 2002], p. 102)

To lend out land within the family is very common, and reflects family solidarity (*fihavana*)⁸ expected from any caring relative. I followed another case where land was given to a son in law. This man came to farm in the village only for one harvest. He then sold the harvest and the couple went back to the natal village of the man.

The President’s wife emphasizes that she would never give land in this way to somebody who is not part of the family. ” *Et s’il y a d’autres personnes qui ne sont pas de la famille qui demandent une de vos terres, est-ce que vous acceptez? Non, parce qu’on ne connaît pas la manière de vivre ou de penser, car il se peut qu’elles aient l’habitude de voler ou de faire de mauvaises choses comme saboter nos cultures comme on cultive à côté. Donc on en ne veut pas prendre le risque d’avoir une telle personne à côté. Donc on ne prête pas nos terres à n’importe qui. Mais si c’est une personne de la famille proche, on leur donne. ”*

”Et si c’est une personne qui vient vivre dans le village, vous lui donnez de la terre?”

”Non, on ne leur en donne pas, parce qu’on ne connaît pas la manière de vivre de la personne. Par exemple, s’il y a un zébu d’une personne⁹ venant du village qui entre dans leur culture, il n’accepte pas de laisser tomber, mais il va prendre un zébu de cette personne. Alors que nous, les propriétaires des terres, ne ferions pas cela, car on est du même village. Il se peut aussi que cette personne fasse semblant de prêter la terre alors qu’après elle prend la terre pour elle.”

Inside the family one either inherits land or can receive it as a gift or as a loan. Even if somebody only comes for one harvest and does not stay on he is given land to cultivate. But for somebody with no connection to the village families it is very hard to gain access. With no kin living in the village a newcomer has a bad position and has to offer a good price for land if he wants to carve out a place of living for himself.

”Inside the family you are granting others a plot, if it is not family you are leasing it

⁸ *Fihavanana* (family solidarity) refers to the sentiment of being part of one big family, the world *havana* means «family». Rabenore 1986 describes *fiHAVANANA* as follows: ” *Amitié et fraternité humaine et aussi bienveillance et tolérance envers les autres hommes: C’est le concept sur lequel reposent la philosophie et la civilisation malgaches. „Fihavanana is commonly translated as «kinship» ” ([Evers 2002], p.55).*

Havana–fiHAVANA approximately consanguinity complex further associations with ideas of community, solidarity, sociability... All Havana are equal – they all share the same substance equally they are thought of as being consubstantial” ([Bloch 1996], p.138).

⁹There is a *dima* that states that the devastation of a culture by an oxen herd is penalized by one Zebu to the owner of the devastated cultivation.” *The dima is an organization designed to promote security and guarantee public order in the absence of any effective «traditional» or state authorities”* (Elli 1993 in Woolley 2002). ” *The dima is primarily concerned with thefts (most importantly of cattle), fights, murder and witchcraft.”* ([Woolley 2002], p.173/4)

out” ([Evers 2002], p. 103).

3.5.2 The “civilian” way for outsiders: the case of the village teacher

The school is organized along centralistic principles based on the French model. A teacher cannot decide himself or herself where he would like to work. The available postings are divided between the candidates on a regional base by the zone administrative et pédagogique- (ZAP-)executive¹⁰

A teacher usually stays for two to four years in a village then he is appointed to a new post. The teachers and the village inhabitants highly disapprove, of these constant moves.

Due to this system, teachers arriving in a village cannot count on the support of kin already installed in the village. If he could do so it would give him a position of power and an easy claim to farmable sites as we have seen above. His only advantage is thus the cultural capital he brings with him and his official position as a teacher. This assures him a right to cultivatable land in the village. After the arrival of a teacher the village elder has to decide where and on whose land he will be allowed to cultivate. As the other villagers say, if you are a «personne sociale» someone will give you land to start your plots. The family of the young teacher *Iaban'I hamba* got land, although it was a bit far away from the village. They even got a lowland garden. However, they have difficulties to starting their cultivation because they have to buy their seeds cup after cup from their neighbors with their incoming salary. The position as teacher gave him the right for a cultivation but to actually cultivate he had to act all by himself without the support of a family. A Cultural capital gives you some rights but does buy you nothing.

3.5.3 The «rich »outsider

There were three houses situated behind a line of eucalyptus trees that marked the border of the village-territory. All of them were built by recent newcomers. A fourth house was still under construction during my stay in Soatany. In one of these houses lived a family of four people. The father belonged to the Betsileo ethnic group. He was married to a woman of Sakalava descent who came from Antsrasou, a village in the outback, south of Soatany. They occupied the house with their fourteen-year-old daughter. This daughter had given birth to a baby a few days ago. The family came down from their former village to live and cultivate nearer to a functional road giving them access to the market. The father of the family has made a *fatijdra*¹¹ -bond

¹⁰This is applicable for teachers paid by the State on a regularly basis and called les «fonctionnaires». The teachers who are paid by the parents of the students are mostly of village origin and are called «vicars».

¹¹Diverse spelling possible, *fatijdra* (Coole ,2001) or *fatidra* (Feeley-Harnik, 1990)

with a local Antesaka family-father. Jennifer Cole describes the concept of *fatijdra* as a relationship created on the idea of blood-siblingship. In a ritual the future blood-siblings declare themselves subject to a mutual curse should one betray the bond. If it is properly honored, the *fatijdra* creates a whole new network of kin on which people may rely (Cole 2001). This is so because it acts not only between the two persons who have engaged in the ritual but also their families and their descendants:

(...): *"They can't marry one another, down to the children of their grandchildren and beyond, until people no longer know the tantara (history), no longer realize that they are fatidra. As long as they know, they cannot marry"* ([Feely-Harnik 1991], p.275). But not only is marriage precluded between members in such a system, the *fatijdra*-bond also evolves in a very close economic relationship that fosters the exchange of goods and services.

"If a fatidra comes like that and asks for lodging or food, you have to give it to him. To go back on fatidra (mamadiky fatidra) is very bad. For example, if the one comes asking for something and the other yells back I do not have anything! Going back on such an oath is like committing sorcery, murder. God sees it and brings badness on such a person" ([Feely-Harnik 1991], p. 275).) A *fatijdra*-bond is really perceived as an enlargement of one's kin group. Alan asked if it was good to do *fatijdra*, given how difficult it was, and her daughter-in-law Tavavy quickly responded "you get kin!" ([Feely-Harnik 1991], p.275) This is a good illustration how Feeley-Harnik (1991) explains that the kinship relations throughout Madagascar are best described as "cumulative". Kinship is not a rigid construct into which you are born. It is something achieved gradually and progressively through life and even thereafter. And it includes the possibility to even build links deliberately by oneself.

To make a *fatijdra* bond with somebody is a very important engagement and an active step towards a close relationship between the two families. A person will choose a *fatijdra* partner very carefully. As one cannot turn down a partner if he asks you for something, one is only going to engage in this with somebody who is one's equal. It has to be a mutual advantage.

The family of the newcomer is quite rich and he knows how to fix radios¹², which always brings in some additional money. His wife is of the ethnic group of the Sakalava and originates from the same place as the wife of his *fatijdra* partner from the village. The village *fatijdra* partner had kind of «lost »his own kin inside the village by a family quarrel. He was keen to get new «kin» which assured a basic assistance in many aspects of the village life.

For the newcomer to have kin in the village was always an advantage and accelerated the integration amazingly. Also the *fatijdra* partner from the village was of great help in finding a lease of cultivable land at a good price. The newcomer also had enough money to pay wages for workers who were helping him to deforest his cultivation site. He was even proud to say that he paid his workers better than anybody else in the village. I did not know if this was a real act of generosity and philanthropy or more a necessity to get the workers at all. One's establishment in a new village demanded

¹²Radios are very important in the rural village, all official and personal information we would find in a newspaper or communicate by telephone, are transmitted by radio.

a great deal of effort and resources. For a wealthy person it was a good investment. As long as one could afford it all from his/her own wealth and did not have to rely on others by contracting debts, ones efforts would have paid off.

3.5.4 The «poor»and socially minimized Antandroy immigrants

Two couples lived in the second house just outside the village territory. One couple lived there for four years. The husband belonged to the ethnic group of the Antandroy and his wife to the one of the Antesaka. Some months ago they have been joined by the wife's sister and her husband who was a member of the ethnic group of the Sakalava. It was them who were engaging in the building of the house which was still under construction. They were planning to invite more family members to come and live in the village. They wanted to strengthen their local kin group but they had to devise another strategy than the family above, since couples of mixed origins were not well accepted in the village. For them finding a *fatijdra* partner inside the village center would have been very unlikely.

How marginal this family was inside the village was shown by the following declaration of the wife of the *fokontany* President: *"Ce Monsieur ne cultive pas, ni dans les monka ni dans le hatsaky. Mais les personnes à côté les Antandroys, je ne sais pas si ce sont les épiciers qui se trouvent au nord de leur maison qui leur ont donné la terre. Mais avant, cette terre a été le WC du village. Et il se peut que quelqu'un lui ai dit de le défricher pour lui. Cette terre se trouve à l'Est de l'école. Et maintenant, il a encore des enfants qui font caca là- bas. Autour de cette terre, personne ne cultive là-bas. Il n'y a que lui, et il peut faire ce qu'il veut avec"* (wife of the *fokontany* président 15.11.2007).

It became also visible that the Antandroy-Sakalava couple had a difficult position in the village in the following coincidence which took place after another village reunion. A younger villager of the ethnical group of the Antesaka claimed that this Antandroy man was illegally taking possession of his cultivation ground. The Antandroy loudly defended himself and the argument concluded in the following accusation: *"Fais attention! Nous sommes les indigènes ici! – Toi tu viens comme étranger, toi tu es l'immigrant! C'est nous les indigènes ici!"*

The ethnical group of the Antandroy incarnated to the villagers the negative image of the grasshopper immigrant benefiting of the *tany fivelômana*, of the longer installed families, and moving on with all the profits once the land was exhausted. That this was a very common prejudice in the region of the Menabe was shown by the description of Sophie Goedefroit: *"Les Antandroy répugnant généralement à s'allier avec la population locale et qui s'échinent à rester entre eux ne sont pas considérés comme Sakalava. Ils occupent parfois depuis plusieurs générations des gros villages, mènent des transactions d'exploitation des terres de brûlis avec les familles Sakalava propriétaires des lieux; mais l'isolement de leurs monumentaux tombeaux alignés sur le bord des routes prouve leur marginalité par rapport aux communautés villageoises. Tout au plus seront-ils désignés comme «enfants de la terre»(zanatany ou valvotaky) si tant*

est qu'ils soient nés en Menabe. Mais cette qualification n'a aucune incidence sur leur statut d'étranger" ([Goedefroit 1998], p. 80).

To further investigate this issue I made some visits to see other Antandroy families. Finally I decided to stay one week in Ranotana, the most remote of the hamlets. Of course in this short time no real observation was possible but at least I understood that it had to deal with accusations that were based more on prejudices than on real differences. It was also interesting to analyze the reactions of the president's family upon my return to the village center. The *fokontany* president asked my translator who we had been visiting out there. When I found out that he was not informed about this family's residence in the hamlet he became angry and explained: "*Ranotana is a very difficult place to keep under control, its inhabitants really have the tendency to come and go as ever they please*" (*fokontany* president 18.10.2007).

I was lacking an example of a family who was in a situation of «clientelism ». I found some hints but did not have the confidence of the persons to become an answer. This surely would have needed much more time and a proper understanding of the language. My translator was reluctant to touch the delicate issue. There were definitely some households in the village that existed in a close relationship with the *fokontany* president. Even though they did not have a direct family connection or belonged to another ethnical group. However, to find out how these relations were really structured I would have needed a lot more time for investigations.

3.6 The graveyard forest, an example for immigration pressure?

During the first week I stayed in Soatany the president of the village called for a general village assembly on Friday night. It soon emerged that the whole village was preoccupied by one topic: the distribution of land for different purposes and the actual clearing and cleaning of the sites chosen for cultivation in the following season. In the middle of the ongoing discussions, suddenly the father of the president¹³ started to speak. He complained that some people have started to cut down trees near the forest of the tombs. His voice was trembling as he shouted out the words, he was very upset. He said that he was well aware of the persons who had done this evil deed. If he was in their place he said, he would be very, very careful. Because if the bushfire would escape from their fields and damage the graveyard forest, he would become very angry. Having spoken out this menace he stood up and walked away from the meeting. The others sat silent for a moment and then started a lively discussion on the topic. Some thought that he was right, that there really was a danger that the information about the people buried there would be lost for ever if the fire would destroy the wooden crosses perched on the tombs. There is no registry and no burial map, the only information are the names inscribed upon the wooden crosses. This conversation went

¹³The owner of the aforementioned ritual on the village divide.

on for a while until the voice of the old man could be heard screaming from behind the house: *"Pourquoi vous continuez de bavarder, c'est tout ce qu'il y a dire sur ce sujet!"* The graveyard forest in Soatany is the dense thicket one must cross to come to the village by the way most villagers take, on the oxen cart track. It is located to the west of the village center, some 800 meters away from the last houses.

"Les termes ala masine (bois saint)et ala fady (bois tabou) indiquent les bouquets d'arbres dans lesquels sont parfois, surtout dans le sud, les cimetières ou certains groupes de tombaux. Il est rigoureusement interdit d'y couper ou ramasser du bois. Ils représentent un des très rares cas dans lesquels le respect des coutumes locales se conjugue avec la protection de la nature" ([Decary 1962], p. 19) If you understand «conservation areas» as places where rarely a human being dares to thread, then this is exactly the case. But the social construction of this place is a totally different one, even when it is called *Ala fady*: what's taboo is not the forest, its the place. The trees growing there are more a favorable coincidence then a condition of the place.

As I already mentioned above, the villagers call the place «the graveyard of the Vahiny's». A *Vahiny* is a guest, a stranger to the place. But he is also somebody invited. A *Vahiny* has a connection to the village, he relates to it and has a right to visit. This could be a guest for a ceremony, a mother visiting her daughter, or an ex-husband coming to see his children. *Vahiny* are generally mentioned with a positive connotation, for example, the wife of the village president asked us to buy her a blue plastic mat, because she would like to have one to host her *Vahiny's*.

The name «graveyard of the Vahiny's»conveys the image that the people living in Soatany while spending there whole life in the village, still consider themselves as belonging to somewhere else. Their entrance to eternity is still located in the place they or their parents came from a long time ago. As Keller ([Keller 2008]p.655) states in her text, they haven't yet made the last step of anchorage to the «new»ground, which would be to construct a tomb near the village.

After this village assembly naturally I wanted to have a look at the graveyard forest as soon as possible. In the most polite fashion we asked the *fokontany* President if he would give us the honor to guide us to the place. He reacted with astonishment. What do you want there? In the forest of the tombs? I said I was ready to follow the custom and spill some rum for the ancestors and do all the necessary things. He became even more astonished. He claimed that no rum was necessary and that he would very much like to guide us there. Alas he would not have the time do so tomorrow, nor the day after tomorrow. My translator asked once more, until even I understood that he was not at all planning to guide us to this place. The tombs are avoided as best as possible. Only during ceremonies are the villagers from Soatany willing to go there, and then always in the security of a group of several persons.

"The dead are more powerful than the living. Their greater power resides essentially in two characteristics: their age and their death" ([Feely-Harnik 1991], p.214). *"Les gens disent que, l'or de ces songes, leurs ancêtres leur apparaissent comme des images fidèles aux souvenirs. Ils portent les vêtements qu'on leur connaissait, ont les mêmes attitudes et les mêmes intonations. Chacune de leur intervention fait l'objet d'une demande, car les ancêtres sont constamment insatisfaits. Ces âmes défuntes ont conservé des senti-*

ments humains. Elles connaissent la tristesse, la colère, la détresse et l'amour: mais ont perdu tout accès à la vie. Elles n'ont donc d'autres recours pour satisfaire leurs besoins que de tyranniser leurs descendants en les accablant de demandes."(Sophie Goedefroit 1998, p.44) *Iaban'I'* Beatrice the son in law of the *fokontany* president, had lost his best friend during my stay in the village. Since then he was so scared that he avoided even to pass on the cart track near the forest of the graveyard because he feared that the spirit of his friend would try to get in contact with him.

The only reason why I was finally able to see the inside of the graveyard forest was on the occasion of the ceremony of the moving of the death: *Vangoindrano*. I was invited to assist by the villagers. During this ceremony the grave is reopened and what remains of the person buried some months before is excavated and transported into a village in the south where the family tomb of the family is sited, a place called *Tjanindrazana*. From the oxen cart track one has to follow a small footpath heading in the direction of the west, into the forest. It takes many bends and turns and one has lower the head several times to pass beneath thick branches until one reaches a barren field. This field has been cleared of undergrowth down to the roots, you walk on the bare sand. It is divided into rectangles with wooden sticks laying on the ground. Towards the east, where the head is positioned a wooden cross informs about the name of the person resting there. The crosses do not necessarily claim a connection to Christianity. Some are decorated with a cape, a special piece of clothing or beside one cross I saw a bottle standing that still contained some liquid. The name of the person and the date of death are engraved into the wood by burning.

Vegetation is all around the site, but the grave itself is cleaned meticulously of all ground vegetation similar to the courtyards in the village. There are no tombs made from cement or other imperishable materials in the village of Soatany. The only markers are the wooden crosses. As everybody is transported elsewhere some time after his death more permanent features are not necessary. During the *Vangoindrano* ceremony the women are dancing *kilalaky* (regional chant and dance) on the side of the graves. During this dancing a woman complained about a root sticking out of the earth hindering the dancing, it was swiftly cut away with a *angady* (sharp spade) by a bystander. Obviously the plant in this moment was just considered as a hindrance and had no other signification for the ceremony. This ceremony is referred to also as the «*tournement des morts*» by the villagers.

3.7 But who is then cultivating beside the graveyard forest?

The one, who has begun with the clearing of a part of forest which was considered to belong to the graveyard forest, was the former president of the forest association of Soatany. He is a family member of the village president. He was the first to have dared to touch this site. Monsieur Lucas as he is called, was an important person in

the village hierarchy, he acted as the president of several associations and *dimas*¹⁴. But then his hearing started to deteriorate. Because of his bad audition he got upset very fast and the villagers became scared of him. Now he is designated as a mean man and has fallen out of the civil society of the village. He passed on his responsibilities to the younger members of the village and lives at the moment with his third wife and his children a secondary habitation beside a rice field in the southwest of the village. His new residence is located right behind the graveyard forest. There he started a new rice cultivation on the annually submerged riverbanks of the Tomitsy. Next to the house he started to burn another plot of forest for the cultivation of maize.

The villagers angrily pointed him out as being the one giving a bad example to others by cultivating in this part of the forest. Before he came along nobody had dared to touch this forest. It was a sort of buffer zone to the precluded place where the graves are really «hidden» in the forest. Once he had started to cut down trees there, others quickly followed his example. They took the action coming from a member of a high-ranking family as a sign that this area had been officially «opened up» for cultivation. *”By behaving according to a particular code of conduct-doing things in the way that appropriate authorities (...) say they are meant to be done – all involved situated themselves in relation to others and others in relation to themselves through moral practice, all the while situating themselves in relation to a particular place that would, thanks to their responsible acts, remain important to them and their families through future generations”* ([Walsh 2006], p. 4).

Among the members of the families living in the village center only a boy of around fifteen years is cultivating also in this area. It is his first cultivation site. The land of his cultivation belongs to *Iaban’I’Emanuelle*. When I asked *Iaban’I’Emanuelle* why he has given this place of cultivation to his nephew and is not cultivating on this site himself, he explained that he would not have dared to cultivate there. He wouldn’t want to stand against the village elders in this issue. He preferred instead to continue cultivation on his actual site even though that implies the risk to be dispossessed by the NGO Fanamby. The land where he cultivates now has only a provisional permission for deforestation by the department of the «département des eaux et forêts». As this is a corrupt body the para-gouvernemental NGO Fanamby is opposing this deforestation permission as we will as we will see in the next chapter.

Iaban’I’Emanuelle is normally not a person to avoid an argument but in this decision he preferred to stand against the NGO (with the support of the village) rather than in direct opposition to the elders of his own family. As for his nephew it seems that he just had no choice. As a young unmarried man, the son of the third brother of the family, he was ready to take the risk.

When the place was «opened up» for cultivation by the village, newcomers joined swiftly the venture. They wanted a part in the rare opportunity to gain access to a cultivation site without contracting further conditions. The wife of the *fokontany* President describes the feeble position of the village families towards those families. Its just not possible to deny them access to the «opened forest», because once declared open, it

¹⁴(see page 50)

now is considered as a «terre delaissée».

”Est-ce que on a le droit de ne pas donner la permission à une personne qui vient d’arriver et qui n’est pas de la famille de cultiver la terre qu’on a délaissée et pour la quelle on n’a pas payé de droit?” *”-Non, on ne peut pas empêcher cette personne de cultiver une terre qu’on a délaissée et pour la quelle on n’a pas le papier attestant le droit payé pour cette terre.*¹⁵ *Mais quand on a le papier, on a le droit de donner ou de ne pas donner ou de louer ou de prêter ou vendre, de donner carrément”* (wife of the fokontany president 15.11. 2007). This statement is confirmed by the fokontany vice-president: While crossing a *monka* of abandoned about twenty years ago I wonder why nobody cultivates here? He explained to me that the owner of the plot had died some years earlier. So for somebody from the village it wouldn’t be right to start cultivating here again. He should at first ask the living for a good cultivation site. A dead person cannot be asked for permission. And to ask is one of the most important parts in gaining rights of usufruct. The family of the deceased would wonder why he is he taking away the land they inherited? But a newcomer with no obligations in the village could just come and start cultivating. If he remarks that there is an old *monka* nobody uses.

Pollini cites Bromely and Cernea to explain this situation” *Common property is not the free-for-all open access resources. Individuals have rights and obligations in situation of common (non individual) property, just s in private individual property situations. (...) The difference is (...) in the unwillingness of the group to evict redundant individuals when that eviction will almost certainly relegate the evicted to starvation. In a sense, the group agrees to lower its own standard of living rather than to single out a particular member for disinheritance”* (Bromley, Cernea, 1989, in [Pollini 2007]p.14). Probably he exaggerates somewhat and I think that his view is too altruistic. But during my interviews it was pointed out to me that it would indeed be a very amoral act to deny a person in need the access to a possible cultivation site. The following proverb was one of the answers I received. *”Tu ne peux pas interdire à quelqu’un de pauvre de chercher du tavolo*¹⁶ *dans la forêt”* (local farmer of Soatany 2007)

If there is a place left where cultivation would be possible and some people are needing a spot to make a living from, you cannot claim ownership and declare the place to be reserved for your future offspring. That would not only be a very selfish act, it is also lacking a legal base in two aspects. This citation from the thesis of Frank Muttentz repeats what I argued before in the chapter about the landscape. *La culture sur brûlis défriché s’appelle tavy*¹⁷ *en malgache et constitue non seulement un mode*

¹⁵I will explain in detail the procedure to obtain a clearing permission for a parcel in the next chapter. in general; all the ground on which the village of Ankaraobato is built and ALL the cultivation sites around are officially defined as «forest ground ». Following the old colonial rule all forest plots are in the possession of the state. There are no legal papers for any ground in Ankaraobato. Everybody has to ask every year for a permission to deforest their cultivation site to the département des eaux et forêt, which apparently is a very corrupt institution, as money changes hands and nobody of the department ever visits the sites in question. (Personal conversation with social anthropologist Gian Gabalzar 22.December 2006)

¹⁶Eatble root

¹⁷Dialectique variation for slash and burn agriculture

d'exploitation agricole des terres mais aussi un mode traditionnel d'acquisition de la propriété foncière coutumière"([Muttzener Frank 2006], p.30).

As long as the families of the village haven't installed their own cultivations there, in the customary judgment the site has no acting owner. From the view of the village center the surrounding space is divided into sectors named after the bearings of the compass. Each family group is assigned a sector for present and future cultivation. At least at the margins of this sectors it becomes very difficult to claim ownership if a site is not obviously cultivated.

This spaces are almost impossible to defend against arriving newcomers, because nobody has legal papers testifying his ownership in the first place. This precarious legal situation makes that the people of the village have no means for opposition against this „wild“ cultivators. Then the graveyard forest also a very special place. As long as the official rule was still valid, the site was not contested and it was easy to turn down the demands, nobody dared to attack the forest of the tombs. But since the «taboo» had been broken by the members of the village themselves there remained no restriction for strangers to join in the cultivation.

This reinforces the contempt against the incoming people and mostly the prejudices against the ones belonging to the ethnical group of the Antandroy. The Antandroy are not allowed to live in the village center, and they do not bury their death in the graveyard forest. This puts them in a marginal position but as they are already sneered at, it allows them in the same time to act regardless of the hostility of the ethnical groups living in the village center. In this context the following declaration of the village president is to be cited: „*Malalay* (the hamlet mostly inhabited by the ethnic group of the Antandroy) *pose un problème*“. This is so because he feels that he is losing his control and influence there. As soon as the newcomers have their own «free» cultivation sites, they can bring in their family and ever less dependent of the mercy of the major village families and willing to pay respect to them. *”Non seulement faut-il avoir le droit pour pouvoir cultiver, mais il faut surtout cultiver pour en avoir le droit. Dans des situations ou le deuxième aspect prime sur le premier, la fonction de sécurisation foncière de la colonisation agraire tend à s'autonomiser”* ([Muttzener Frank 2006], p. 133)

For the immigrants the graveyard forest represents is just THE opportunity. In times where conservation measures become are more and more applied, possibilities to get a proper place to start ones own cultivation become extremely rare.

”La conversion de sols forestiers à l'usage agricole compte parmi les investissements en travail les plus sûrs même lorsqu'elle est pratiquée illégalement. Elle crée des droits coutumiers opposables à d'autres prétendants dans un contexte de forte compétition pour les ressources et reconnus par les agents locaux de l'administration” ([Muttzener Frank 2006], p.133)

An «open »site like this is just a very welcome gift. These families are really on at the same time at the lowest level of the social hierarchy and on the brink of survival. There is not much thought lost, when they can decide whether to loan a piece of land on an incredible high rate or start a cultivation on their own in a protected site and be free of all debts and obligations.

It is important to conclude that the graveyard forest is not the representation of a forest under protection (as the conservationist would like to see it) there is no idea of a «holy grove»(as for example in Benin and Ethiopia). There are no trees protected because of spirits living in them. The place, not the forest is endowed to the spirits of the death. "(...) *By transgressing taboos, these visitors were breaking the places with which these taboos were associated, threatening the future productivity of local land and the integrity of local sacred sites at which long-time residents realized important and sustaining reciprocal relationships with family and descent group alliance partners, as well as with God, ancestors and local spirits.*(...) *a man who recognizes that on's responsibilities to and for ancestors descendants land and community are intertwined and must be carefully maintained to ensure prosperity and continuity over the long term.* (...) "[Walsh 2006], p. 4). The function of the forest is more one of camouflage, of shielding the place from view of eventual by-passers. Everybody has at least one closely related person close buried there and is a bit scared to encounter them again in their spiritual form.¹⁸

The concern of the villagers is the fear to loose the information on the wooden crosses, it is not about loosing the trees to the fire. "*Le feu, c'est un problème parce que les croix avec les noms des morts peuvent brûler - et puis on ne se souvient plus qui est enterré où, le déplacement au Tjanindrazana devient ainsi impossible*". (Grand-mother Parlera) Still, a part of the forest has been spared. The spot where the graves are really sited is still protected as nobody dares to go in there. K : *Pourquoi la place n'est pas utilisée comme une autre place du village?"* -*Parce qu'il y a des esprits là-bas qui sont plus ou moins forts. (...) Non, les arbres n'ont pas de fonction spéciale*" (Grand-mother Parlera 6.11. 2007).

The discussion in the village is not about the protection of this special forest. The forest is not perceived as something needing protection as we have seen in the chapter about the meaning of forest. The discussion is more about the idea of an untouched area. Trees are standing in this place because this was the state of the land when the first settlers arrived and have decided to install the «anteroom»for their death there. As long as there was enough place for cultivation, the place was just left as he was: "*(...) Certainly sites that have taboos associated with them are perceived to be inherently powerful and consequently attractive to many. What taboos associated with such places really indicate, then is how people's much desired access to sacred places is and should be controlled so as to ensure that such places remain sacred, powerful and attractive into the future. And it falls to people like Tombo [the local leader] -the most vigilant protectors of such places- to determine just what such regulation should entail, and under what circumstances the rules might be bent*" ([Walsh 2005], p.4)

Now the situation changed, the untouched area in the core remains but the former buffer zone has been compacted ever more as the border of the cultivation area was pushed inwards. The trees in this buffer zone have lost their signification as a pro-

¹⁸The death are imagined as being out and about as spirits during day time and reentering the grave around six o'clock just before night falls. Independent of their characters as living persons, spirits are tediously on demanding something, and if its only their rapid displacement to the family tomb.

tecting screen around the site. The move inwards endangers a place that stands at the centre of ritual life for a part of the population of Soatany. The danger to the burial site finally pushes the holder of the rights to the village rituals into action. At a turbulent village meeting he menaces the invaders with his fury if something should happen to the sacred place. This menace brings the conflict into the open in front of all the villagers.

3.8 Conserving the forest in Soatany

As described above, Soatany is currently the focus of many conservationist projects, each trying to impose its values of resource management on the village. It is not my goal to analyze the differences in the approach towards forest management of the Malagasies and the environmentalists, nor is my work aiming to judge the work of the two conservationist organizations currently at work in the village. I will show examples of the economic and social values and the way of thinking about the forest, that these organizations try to impose on the village. It is possible to see how the local government responds and adjusts to these changes. The current political situation motivates the actions of the villagers, and both this and the imposed changes will affect the local importance of the «forest ». It remains to be seen whether this changing notion influenced by outside interventions, will prevail and help to protect the remaining forests in the long term or whether more immediate needs linked to immigration and subsistence will continue to prevail to the detriment of the global ecosystem.

3.8.1 Outside definitions of forest: a nation on a «suicide track»?

¹⁹ In 1981, Madagascar had accumulated a total foreign debt of one billion USD and had to announce total bankruptcy. With the «help» of the World Bank and IMF, it started its first structural adjustment programs. This reopened Madagascar (that had been a hostile terrain for capitalism since independence) to foreign investments and influence. The 1980's were a period of increasing international concern about environmental issues, while forest clearing and land burning peaked due to the collapse of the economy. Among the first visitors were biologists who brought lemurs and fires into the media spotlight in order to inform the public about Madagascar's high biodiversity and rapid deforestation. ([Pollini 2007], p.75) This was when Madagascar was first conceived of as a threatened biodiversity hotspot and appeared on the agenda of the major international conservationist pressure groups, such as the IUCN or the WWF. The Malagasy government, always in need of solvent donors, quickly understood the benefits it could get from this situation to obtain the foreign aid that was necessary for solving the debt crisis (Jolly 2004, in [Pollini 2007], p 75).

¹⁹[Keller 2008], p. 655

In 1984, Madagascar created the National Commission of Natural Resource Conservation for Development in charge of preparing the Malagasy Strategy of Natural Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development, called for by the IUCN, UNDP and WWF. The strategy was adopted in 1984 and a second international environmental conference was held in 1985 to launch it. The Malagasy state worked to “improve its institutions”, to adopt tools and methods for environmental management and to implement actions aimed at stopping degradation (World Bank 1988). The conference was also the moment when Prince Philip of England, the international president of WWF, confronted President Ratsiraka with the statement, “your nation is committing suicide” ” (Kull 2004, p. 239, in Pollini, p.85). After this conference, several nationwide projects were initiated, all of them funded by international donors like the World Bank, bilateral donors (especially the US and Switzerland), the WWF and UNESCO. The climate for receiving grants for environmental issues was very favorable at that time. The World Bank itself was in severe need of greening its image and activities. Hence all conditions were met to establish an ambitious National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP).²⁰ This plan was legally recognized as being the translation into action of the national environmental policy by the adoption of the National Environment Charter (Government of Madagascar 1990). This law confirmed the willingness to link human development and environmental conservation issues. The national Environmental Action Plan was translated into action by a three-phase program funded by the World Bank and other donors ([Pollini 2007], p.86).

This history of the almost neo-colonial conservationist impact on the island is still very present in the formulation of the current programs. I have chosen not to go into more detail because the scale of the national level is not my aim. I find it more significant to explain how an outside definition of «forest», which was totally foreign to the local population, is handled by the local power structure and experienced in the village of Soatany.

3.8.2 The «forest »of Soatany

When a *vazaha* ²¹ asks to see the «forest »(*ala be*) in Soatany, he or she is directed to the broad forest in the north of the village bordering the CFPF forest reserve. As this is not an uncommon request, (not uncommon for a *vazaha*), the local administration of Soatany provides guides with the permission from the president of the local forest association to visit to the «forest». The forest for this official presentation is neither the graveyard-forest nor the forest of Bemokoy in the northwest of the village. This is also a statement of pride: forest [*ala be*] in Soatany is two walking hours away and not just around the corner as in other villages. You are shown the official «forest of Soatany», the forest reserve which is officially designated as communal forest and is the cornerstone of a program called GCF (Gestion Contractuelle des Forêts) under the

²⁰National Association for Environmental Actions (in French: Association Nationale d’Actions Environnementales).

²¹Local expression designating either white foreigners or police and military agents

administration of the NGO Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust.

3.8.3 The forest association in Soatany «Soa Tahiry Menabe»

²² An important part of the installation of the communal forest program GCF is the establishment of a local forest association. This association should represent the legal body, operating on the presumption of a democratic procedure of all decisions to take in link with the maintenance of the forest. This should give everybody in the village the possibility to participate. In the case of Soatany this association is called «Soa Tahiry Menabe».

Muttenzer claims that Madagascar served as a laboratory for a range of projects of all types, all of them displaying the same principal failure. They tend to be representations of the official position of Madagascar, negotiated between the demands of the international community and the national elite. This creates an impressive «superstructure» but totally ignores the needs in villages and the local response to the decisions handed down from above. ([Muttzener Frank 2006], p.12)

«Superstructure» is not the word I would have chosen to describe the policy on environmental projects stated in leaflets and presentation addressed to donors but the NGO Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, the initiator of the GCF program (Gestion contractuelle des forêts) in the forest of Soatany uses this very impressive official term paired with a contrived rural approach. With a glance at the Durrell Wildlife Trust website one can grasp the highly symbolic vocabulary that is used to address the international donors. *"Madagascar displays levels of species endemism (i.e. species that are found nowhere else) higher than anywhere in the world, which has led the island to be identified as one of world's top 'megadiversity' countries and a foremost conservation priority area. (...) Madagascar's unique and fragile ecosystems have been under considerable pressure for many years, principally from habitat destruction caused by human activities. The main threats are slash-and-burn agriculture, mining and logging (either for charcoal or construction wood). The practice of cutting forest to clear for either grazing or cultivation increased dramatically in the 1980's and predictions indicate that unless halted most forest could be removed by 2050"* (Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust www.durrell.org/Conservation/Where-we-work/Madagascar/ [visited 10.7.2008].).

These official positions, are accompanied by the typical mismatch between their construction of reality and what actually exists (Pollini 2007). *"In all projects Durrell focuses on the development of community capacity to manage conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources. This is achieved primarily through training and capacity-building in local communities and by providing support for community led management"*. (Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust: www.durrell.org/Conservation/Where-we-work/Madagascar/ [visited 10.7.2008].)

It does not appear as a contradiction that the local community first has to be trained to manage conservation, the high-flying plans do not even reflect that the population is

²²fantastic seeds of Menabe (name of the region)

accustomed to handling their environment for ages. The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust is interested in integrating the forest of Soatany into their program. This comes as a response to the demand of the international donors. As the donors are primarily motivated by the individual endangered species and less by whole ecosystems, the NGO developed programs of conservation give priority to some endangered endemic species. Some of them are still present in the communal forest of Soatany. This explains the interest of the organization to install the «gestion contractuelle des forêts »(GCF) in the forest of Soatany.

I share Muttenez's (2007) criticism that these forest contract programs are merely the same old interests disguised in a new bottles. There is no real concern here to include the local concepts. The substance of the forest law has not been adapted to a new communal way of sustaining the forest.

"Selon la justification courante du transfert de gestion des ressources naturelles aux communautés locales, les contrats de gestion seraient un instrument pour réconcilier les lois domaniales léguées par le colonisateur avec les modes coutumiers d'acquisition et de transmission des droits fonciers"([Muttenez Frank 2006], p. 20).

The project of the Durrell Trust (GCF) is far from integrating any local land claims. Not surprisingly the local interpretation of the program is that of having lost the forest to the *vazaha* (foreigners). This loss implies the impossibility for the village to further expand. With not many *tany fivelômana* open for cultivation for their succession, there is no reason to invest 30 zebus in the construction of a family tomb in the village. When the descendents will lack space for future growth and thus will not have the resources to maintain the tomb and provide the necessary sacrifices.

3.8.4 The golden Egg, or what's at stake

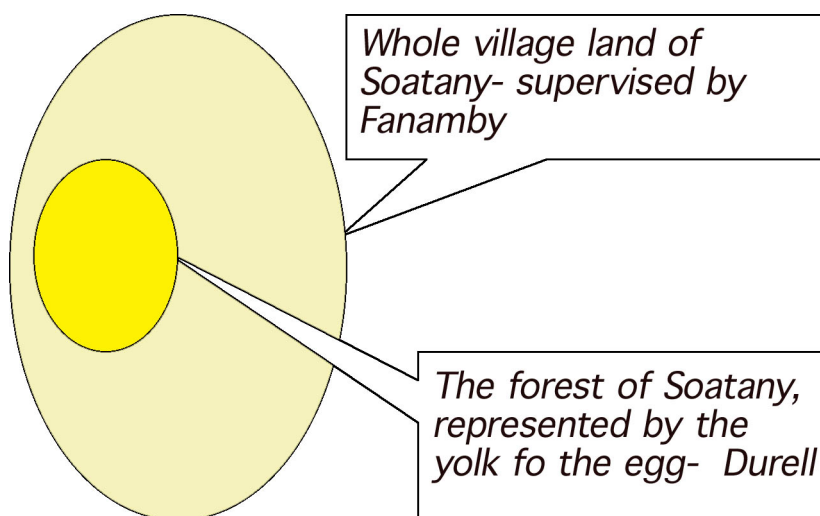


Figure 3.1: Design by the *fokontany* president (2007)

Apart from the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Fanamby another para-statal²³ (but Malagasy) NGO is working in Soatany. The president of the *fokontany* explained to me his understanding of their aims of their goals by drawing the design reproduced so above in the courtyard in front of his house. The whole perimeter of the village is represented by the egg, this includes all cultivation sites and patches of natural forest and old *monkas*. The yolk of the egg is the «forest of Soatany » in the north. Now the whole village area, the whole egg is controlled by the NGO Fanamby. But the yolk of the egg has been appropriated by the NGO Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (*fokontany* president 2007). His disappointment and envy of having lost the sovereignty over the village territory to these organizations is clear. Obviously the two NGO's Durrell and Fanamby do not have the same status in the village. The local executive of the Durrell Conservation Trust Project Menabe, is invited to eat with the *fokontany* president when he comes to the village. The agents from the Fanamby NGO on the other hand are not even given the customary palm mat to sit down before the house of the village president to state their reason for coming to the village. They have to sit directly on the sand. *"From the time of Merina dominance to this day, villagers have been expected to provide state-affiliated guests with food"* ([Cole 2001]p. 238). This is a clear statement of the *fokontany* president. He openly denies the official status of the Fanamby NGO. *"Fanamby c'est projet, ce n'est pas l'état"* (*fokontany* president 2007). All the other official state agents that happened to come through the village during my stay there were offered plastic chairs to sit. This disparity of treatment is not due to a difference of status or the way the NGO's agents approach villagers. It is mainly the interests of the village president's family, who are exhibited by this difference in behavior. As seen above the Durrell foundation is mostly interested in the conservation of the forest estate in the north of the village. The north of the village is also the territory of the other major family of the village. Almost all their cultivation sites lay in this direction of the village. And the forest would be just the line of expansion of their sector (see above).

This explains why the family of the president is keen to follow up on this GCF program. In installing the «protection» of the Durrell foundation, the forest became a «communal» forest, out of reach of the other major family. Even upon the land adjoining the forest a sort of buffer zone status was imposed. The following citations give proof of the mixed experiences of the villagers:

"On avait un champs au nord, mais le ben'ny ala [owner of the forest] n'aimait plus ça. Parce qu'il y avait des gens qui ont défriché la forêt. Ils [the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust.] nos ont donné la cultivation ici au sud." (wife of monsieur Alois 2007)

Il y avait des gens qui ont défriché là-bas [au nord] c'est pourquoi il a détesté [la cultivation] le ben'ny ala, le vazaha a donné cette terre ici, ils ne cultivent plus au nord".

"La dernière partie au nord on ne cultive plus ici parce que c'est délicat, c'est trop

²³As a para-statal NGO I would designate an organisation that claims independent funding and direction but acts on the terrain in the way a state would, enforcing rules and providing services (that were previously provided by the public sector) (See also [Wolch 1990]p.14).

proche de la forêt, parce que les gens ont l'habitude de brûler- ça veut dire qu'ils brûlent peut être plus, si ils mettent le feu. Maintenant on laisse la terre pour les zébus. C'est un accord "entre nous" de laisser tomber cette partie" (gendarme de la forêt Soatany).

The decision to leave the northern part of the village area as a grazing ground to the zebu and to install new fields only in the south of the village was proclaimed during a village meeting. The south of the village belongs to the family of the *fokontany* president. Not all the families have changed their farming habits. One family is still farming very near the forest on a site they have started to clear about a year ago. But the threat of an invading, devastating zebu herd with no possibility of compensation for lost crops has persuaded many to farm further to the south. In addition there is a lack of drinking water in the north; this makes a permanent residence in this area very laborious during the harvest season.

The installation of the GCF keeps the forest out of reach of the other major family. It also strips the other family of a huge parcel of land on which they have built their fortune in previous years. It also brings new clients to the fields which belong to the family of the *fokontany* president. Apparently this is not a rare occurrence. Muttzener claims that: *"La question n'est plus aujourd'hui celle d'un arbitrage entre production et conservation mais de savoir quelles familles réussiront à faire reconnaître leur réserves foncières. (...) leurs pratiques juridiques consistent à réinterpréter le droit étatique occidental en fonction des logiques foncières endogènes"* ([Muttzener Frank 2006], p. 52).

The procedure of the Durrell Foundations is to first install a local forest association in this case the «Soa Tahiry Menabe ». This association then demands the transfer of the maintenance of the forest from the state to the new legal body. The GCF is thus based on a contract that formalizes the passing on of the responsibility to the local actors (papier de demande de transfer de gestion, established by Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust 2007). This local association is considered to be open for membership by everybody living in the village area and willing to pay a small annual fee. The Durrell Wildlife Trust acts under the assumption that all members of the association then are equal in right and interests. This is really a utopian idea, a bid to create a new community independent of every other family or power structure of the village. Muttzener (2006) is right when he asks how such an «egalitarian» repartition of benefits can function in a society, that is based on a strong hierarchy and status inequality.

The forest association of Soatany is exclusively in the hands of the family of the *fokontany* president and his clientele. Since the beginning the number of members remains stable at around a dozen persons. The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust tries to attract new members with different forms of such as, like bicycles for the forest police, a football pitch, competitions with big prizes, and money of which the association can freely dispose but despite the considerable efforts, there are no new members. When I wanted to know why they are not members of the association the first answer I received was *"Le président de l'association (the brother of the president of the fokontany) mange tout l'argent"* (Madame Rosanne). The accusation of corruption was easily formulated. In the view of the rest of the village, the whole organization only serves to

conserve and enforce the power of the *fokontany* president's family. Admission to the organization would imply a lot of «communal» work for the direct benefit of the family of the *fokontany* president with no advantage for the normal members. Nobody who is not in a certain way bound to the *fokontany* president's village family would take on this charge.

The Durrell holds a competition each year among the ten villages in the current program, to designate the one that is most advanced in its conservation efforts. The village of Soatany won second price and received a tender to construct an office for the forest association. The construction of the office evolved extremely slowly as nobody really wanted to help because it was assumed that this «office» would only serve as another house for the family of the president. This forest office wanted to receive a corrugated roof, and enforced cement walls. This new style of construction for the village was first applied by the other major family, which has three houses of this style. This could easily lead to the idea that the construction is another way to catch up to or pass the other major family.²⁴

Ça devient une maison à lui [le président de la forêt]” (mama n'I Etienne 2007).

The establishment of this system of contractual forest maintenance is also presented as a possibility to solving the problems of coordination between different stakeholders. It constructs the illusion of a democratic process in which all actors, even the most humble ones, can freely express their opinions, attend meetings, and have their interests considered, where everybody is equal and can take part in the important decisions that concern their future. In short the contractual project constructs a false reality of a democratic process leading to compromises serving the needs of all the stakeholders. *”Comment gérer sur une même espace le grand nombre d'acteurs d'usagers et d'intérêts souvent contradictoires et incompatibles? En faisant participer les intéressés à l'élaboration des objectifs de la gestion et au processus de décisions forestières quelle que soit leur identité culturelle ou professionnelle, en permettant à chacun, et notamment aux plus humbles acteurs sociaux, de négocier son propre avenir”* ([Muttzener Frank 2006] p.92). As described this has nothing to do with the reality in the village. Not one of the «humble» actors would consider the possibility of openly opposing the ideas of the family of the *fokontany* president as a real option open to him. If the kind of equality was real, he wouldn't be an involuntary member of the association and would not be constructing a house for the family of the *fokontany* president without a salary.

”Il ne faut donc pas être dupe et conserver à l'esprit que l'Idéologie est bien souvent au service des plus puissants qui la manipulent à leur guise. Ils s'y conforment quand elle est susceptible de légitimer leur préséance, leur emprise sur une terre ou sur un territoire. C'est lorsque les ordonnancements idéologiques des espaces leur tient lieu de support qu'ils veilleront à ce qu'il soit observé. Mais dès l'instant où leurs intérêts se situent en dehors de cette sphère, ils se permettent toutes les libertés et toutes les trans-

²⁴This new form of construction is very expensive, because a specialist is needed and the material is very expensive. The traditional house is constructed by the owner himself from the material abundant in the forest and in the surroundings of the village.

gressions. *La configuration actuelle des territoires villageois est donc le produit d'une subtile alchimie entre la représentation idéologique les formes les plus contemporaines d'organisation sociale et les besoins des habitants* " ([Goedefroit 1998], p.51) I already argued in my research questions the people in power have a degree of influence on the concepts and ideologies, which is not to be undervalued. It is those people who are able to adjust imported ideologies to make them fit the actual political situation. This is why it is so important to analyze the actual situation and see who is equipped with the real power of to make decisions. As Andrew Walsh (2006) analyses "*moral codes can appear quit rigid when systematized in discourse, but are in fact highly flexible in how they can be interpreted and applied by those who claim the authority to do so. This consists much more then just a change of heart on the part of one individual- it hints at a broader transformation in local demographics and ecology even as it indicates efforts at keeping such transformation from rendering local life beyond recognition*"(2006, p. 4).

It demands a particular ability of the persons in power to keep both sides satisfied. To keep a persuading line of argumentation towards the villagers needs a capability to negotiate with those responsible for the projects and their imposing demands to generate benefits that allow him to co-opt potential opponents. This becomes even more complicated when the interests of the villagers and the goals and visions of a project are so opposite as it is the case for the Soatany forest.

To administrate such a position of power as does the *fokontany* President is thus a show of political abilities in communication, persuasion and co-option²⁵ To remain at such a position requires the skill of adopting ones arguments to the circumstances of the current discourse and the ruthlessness to bend the project aims formulated abroad into something benefiting ones actual interests. As we will see while the pressure on the village gains in force, it becomes necessary for the project to impose themselves onto more spheres of the village life, which demands more adjustments by the villagers.

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²⁵ "*Pour les élites politiques (...) l'idée de «servir l'Etat »fait moins sens que celle de «se servir», pour servir préférentiellement ensuite SA communauté d'origine ou ses fidèles clients, même se le rêve ultime (...) de se transformer en Big Man hégémonique, à la fois admiré, craint et respecté. (...) elle suppose en effet de renouveler sans cesse les marques de générosité tous azimuts pour pouvoir conserver sa prééminence par rapport aux concurrents potentiels, (...)*" ([Chabal 1999], p.27).

serve as the middleman between the villagers and the conservation organizations. It implies not only the skill understand and speak French but also the need to hide this from the other villagers, as not to become a *vazaha* in their eyes. Language abilities are also best hidden from the people from the NGO in order not to appear to smart, while still continuing to be the «translator» between the project and the village. The role of the translator is crucial in controlling the passage of information between the project and the villagers and being capable to keep ahead of that information to maintain a certain leeway of action for oneself.

The Durrell organization is not very much liked in the village. As we have seen above, the association and their communal contract is of no significance to the villagers. They interpret to mean that Durrell has taken possession of the forest and is now the new *be ny ala*. The leader of the Project, is identified as a city dweller, a «Vazaha ». He is seen as being entirely above of all the social structure of the village. K: *"et C. [The responsible of the Project] est il un vazaha aussi ? – Papan'I Fisorana: "Oui, il est vazaha aussi."* (Personal conversation 2007) The Durrell staff has taken on a position of power and control in the village, which has no justification on the local level. The project has founded its legitimacy only by its alliance with the family of the *fokontany* president. Locally it is considered as a «family- actor », some kind of affiliate kin not a public, communal project. The *fokontany* president's family gives the Durrell staff the illusion that the project is well established and efficient due to his role as the official representative of the village. But inside the village he acts as a private actor in the interest of his family.

3.8.5 Shifting representations?

The most important thing to note perhaps is that the project has not changed the social value of the forest resource for the villagers. The «communal forest » still represents agricultural land for the future generations of the village. The interference of the Durrell project is considered as an advantage in the sense that the Durrell project gives a reason to refuse the demand of the newcomers for farmland. In this sense, the land can be guarded for the next generation of the village. *"Parce que les gens ont peur, ils ne cultivent plus sur les monkas dans la direction de la forêt, quand le feu mange la forêt c'est leur faute, et ils ont peur. Mais l'avantage du travail avec le projet c'est que la forêt est protégée pour nos descendants, comme ça on peut garder pour nos descendants."* (vice president 15.10. Soatany 2007)

A discussion with a *gendarme de la forêt* shows how strange it seems for the villagers to safeguard the forest from themselves. He took us as acting on behalf of the CFPF and proposed us a deal: we would turn a blind eye while they would clear away the communal forest (the very one administered by the Durrell trust) while on the contrary we would be helped with the protection of the CFPF area.

There is one heroic story of the efficient forest police told and retold for the *vazaha*, to impress me with the efficiency of the project. This story was recounted by the CFL of Soatany and it points out some other interesting points.

”On parle d’une personne qui a volé du bois et qui s’est enfuie d’Ampataka[another village in the west]. Ils ont détruit la pirogue. C. [The responsible for the Durrell Project Menabe] leurs a dit de décider des punitions si vous allez jusqu’à Ampataka pour lui faire payer une amande. Mais ils [les CFL] ne sont pas allés jusqu’à Ampataka. Il [la personne d’Ampataka] a coupé le bois et puis il a commencé à faire la pirogue avec. Et puis il a quitté après. Ils [les CFL] ont vu que la personne venait d’Ampataka, elle était là pour couper le bois, mais ils n’ont pas attrapé le monsieur, mais ils ont laissé là ses bagages parce que c’était très précieux, et puis c’était Coco, le staff de Durrell, c’est lui qui disait que c’est vous qui décidez entre vous pour la punition que vous voulez lui donner. Si vous voulez y aller jusqu’à Ampataka pour lui dire de donner une amande, c’est vous qui décidez, ça n’est pas nous. Et puis ils ont décidé qu’ils vont laisser tomber comme ça, ils ont caché simplement cette pirogue. Celle qu’il était en train de construire, comme ça il ne revient pas, il ne revient plus.”

The consequence of the described power relation is that the forest police does not have the representation and legitimacy of a communal project to punish another villager. As explained above, the forest association is seen as a «family- project»; and from the point of view of the local customs has no owner rights to the forest. Worse, the members of the association have no social reputation. They are defined as the poor, the ones who have to wait for the promised seedlings from the Durrell trust, before being able to start their farming. *”C’est pas comme les autres- ce sont eux qui n’ont pas de semences.”* (maman’I Thérèse). *” C’est pas les gens qui n’ont pas de semences”* (the wife of the school director). A better social reputation is only gained by becoming a farmer on one’s own land. To be capable to provide one’s own food is the basic expectation of the people living in the village. Five of the twelve members of the forest association are also regularly working as wage laborers for the Tennistock logging company that recruits people from the village. This means that they have left behind subsistence farming and become actors in the market economy, but at the same time forfeiting their reputation as valid community members.

After a distance of about 1 km into the «forest of Soatany» some trees on the side of the road are marked with red signs painted on the trunks. The painting is part of the forest zones concept of the Durrell trust. The signs mark the end of the first forest zone; still open for the extraction of different forest products. Beyond the marked trees the extraction of any forest product is strictly prohibited. *“Dans le système de référence symbolique des pratiques divinatoires (vinta) le rouge (mena) est associé à l’or et à l’astre solaire qui représente l’autorité en général et le pouvoir royal en particulier”* (Sophie Goedefroit 1989 p.94). It seems that the color should represent the new power in place. Intended as communal power it is perceived as the appropriation of the forest by the *vazaha*, as the new *be ny ala* (owner of the forest) by the locals. In this sense the forest has changed in appearance. The forest of Soatany has (momentarily?) fallen out of the reach of the villagers. It has stopped being a resource for the village; it has ceased to represent «waste» land for the village, this is the sense of land that is still open for cultivation, land whose potential is still unused, waste. The restricted part has become more *mazava*, dark, cheerless, negative because it is left there robbed of the potential of transformation into an open space for the society. That the access is

strictly forbidden prevents the entrance of human beings in a stronger way than before. *"La difference entre monka et forêt? – Dans les monkas les hommes peuvent y aller pour chercher le bois de construction, laisser brouter les zebus. La forêt c'est où il y a les biby, les lémuriers- pour que les animaux y soient protégés"* (CFL of Soatany).

"La forêt, c'est ce qui est sous protection" (Iaban'I Emanuelle). These statements show the impression, forest is an area from where humans have become banned. But this also implies, this forest is of no use for the villagers any more.

Many of the obstacles defining the forest before are removed in the way of the conservation proceedings. *"Forest where access is difficult"*. As of 1985, there is a cart track leading directly into the forest, (built by foreign oil prospectors (Gemini 1996)). This track is maintained by the NGO's. From the village access is not real problem anymore, even though the forest police has felled some small trees in an attempt to block out unwelcome guests. Forest is where orientation is difficult, where you are left in the dark. The Durrell trust, with the help of the forest police, are putting a system of orientation into place, marking rows of trees with coordinate numbers to always know exactly where one is. The forest has stopped being an untamed place. The Durrell trust undertakes a regular identification of the plants and trees growing inside. The place has ceased to be the place left to the rules of the *biby* (animals). It has been integrated in a globalised system of regulations and control. It is not only the presence of the CPL, but also the regular presence of the Durrell staff that impresses the locals. During our visit in the forest of Soatany we meet up with a pair of Durrell staff at work. One was a massive man, with the typical outback dress of a city dweller. He was wearing overalls with small pockets to stock items like a pencil, a notepad or a compass or other measuring instruments. His was accompanied by another person, clearly from a village, wearing a *lamba* (cloth) around the waist, a t-shirt in tatters and a tape measure in his right hand.

The locals have become the assistants for the knowledgeable, working against their own needs in a way inconsistent with their own concept of the forest to their village. All this is impressive but not persuasive. It is important also that the forest association it is not the communal project as it pretends to be. In this sense, the Durrell trust is seen as a private actor representing private interests, disposing of private plan to reach then goals. It is not understood as an experiment in passing-on knowledge and know-how for the interest of everybody. The actions of the Durrell Trust Foundation and the local forest association seem to concern only the spot where the forest of Soatany is situated and is not associated with a larger goal of nature conservation by the villagers.

3.8.6 Who defines «forest »?

As Mauro Genini, a former forester of the Kirindy forest explains: *"In theory authorizations for forest clearing is asked for at the regional forest service by the community (fokontany). The forest service has to visit the site and approve of it. Then the terrain is delimited and a permit valid for one year is issued free of charge. In reality the majority of permits have been issued without site inspection or without serious*

delimitations. «Extensions »were linked to a certain amount of money to be paid by the farmer. Other irregularities were authorizations issued directly by the authorities for the community or permits for setting fire to former clearings in order to eliminate weeds, but the location given on the permit actually referred to primary forest plots” ([Gemini 1996],p.52).

Until recently this was no big issue, requests, accompanied with a sufficient amount of money, were normally approved by the government body. But now the farmers in Soatany face a new problem, they have to consider the actual «definition »of their future cultivation site; is it still an old *monka* or has it been reclassified as «forest»by the NGO’s in the meantime ?

”A l’époque, les gens adressaient une lettre de demande des anciens *monka* à eaux et forêts et ils donnaient leur accord. Mais on n’a pas le droit de défricher la forêt. Par contre, on a le droit de défricher l’ancien *monka*. L’*ala be*, c’est à dire la grande forêt, appartient aux eaux et forêts de Morondava, donc c’est protégé. C’est pour cela qu’il y a le bureau de la forêt et les CFL [contrôleur de la forêt locale] ici dans le village”. (interview with the wife of the *fokontany* president 15.11. 2007)

As described above, the local distinction between *hatsake/monka* and *ala be* is a clear distinction when the cultivation site is in full maturation but this clear definition becomes more vague with passing time. It is a distinction based on the idea of ownership and personal investment in the land. As seen in the second chapter the relevant distinction is not between land reclaimable for agriculture on one side and «forest »excluded from agricultural use on the other hand. ”*La représentation occidentale de la séparation des espaces agricoles et forestiers est subrepticement réintroduite dans les mesures de reconnaissance du droit endogène qui ignore pourtant cette séparation des espaces*” ([Muttzener Frank 2006], p.83).

Now there is a foreign, exogenous, definition of «forest »imposed on the farmers in Soatany. A definition built on a «neutral», «scientific»base by trained biologists. They come to the village, inspect all the ground and determinate the sites of agricultural land and«forest ». This is the role that the para-gouvernemental NGO Fanamby is effecting in the village, they make maps showing the areas for agriculture and the areas protected as «forest ». “*Dans les pays dépendants de l’aide internationale, les nouvelles agences environnementales, créés pour les besoins de la cause, jouent un rôle d’administration parallèles sous le contrôle des bailleurs de fonds internationaux, tandis que l’Etat conserve, théoriquement, la fonction normative grâce à son monopole sur le domaine forestier, la fonction cognitive tend à lui échapper pour se retirer dans des mondes distants et non contemporains*” ([Muttzener Frank 2006] , p.103).

”Si on ne travaille pas pour Fanamby? Il a dit que les Fanamby, ils ne travaillent pas comme Durrell, ils travaillent plutôt de tous qui est la forêt, et puis les Fanamby, ils travaillent avec les villageois, avec les cultures. Par exemple, l’année passée, ils ont distribué des tubercules aux gens, comme des *ovy*²⁶(CFL Soatany 2007). The forest police tried to discuss this in a casual way, but it is clear that the Fanamby-projects are directly interfering in the live of the locals. They are not strictly focused on the «forest

²⁶Ovy cf. Oviaia, edible root

»but are penetrating in the most sensitive domain of the villagers; their cultivations. The mission of Fanamby is not only to administrate the control of the official environmental measures in the village, they organize a range of «development-agricultural training-projects», all in the intention to enhance the agricultural success of the local farmers.

As becomes clear from the above, the Fanamby organization is hated by the villagers and encounters an openly displayed ignorance of their official role. Examples abound: a meeting that had been agreed to, for a long time between the president of the forest association and the representatives is «forgotten»; the *fokontany* president prefers to go to a conference with the ZAP (Zone Administrative et pédagogique) - responsible for discussing the transfer of a local teacher, than to accompany the Fanamby-staff on the inspection of the village territory to establish the new local cultivation plan for this year; the wife of the *fokontany* president pretends to have no power to act at the place of the *fokontany* president, even as she otherwise self-confidently decides about cultivation sites and loans; (this disguise is made easier as the other side already arrives with the prejudice they are meeting «only»the wife and that the boss is absent).

These feelings were stirred up by an actual case. The *monka* jaobenga (- map) was not cultivated for about 20 years. The former owner of the *monka* has left the village. The *fokontany* president made the query for the right to cultivate on this place in the south of the village to the département des l'eaux et forêts. The query was accepted at a cost of 25'000 Ariary (ca. 20\$, an enormous sum). The cultivable land was divided up between different families, (*Iaban'I'* Emanuelle, the brother of the president, the family of the presidents brother's niece, the family of Monsieur Edwin (also a member of the forest association) and eventually the son-in law, who had not started cultivation yet. When Fanamby came to the village with the intention to establish the new cultivation plan on this site, wage workers that already been working for some days deforesting the site. *Iaban'I'* Emanuelle who was deforesting on his own just beside the *fokontany* president (see also chapter two): “*Les Fanamby sont fachés mais on s'en fout, on a déjà l'accord des eaux et forêts.*” The “Fanamby «specialists »then decided that the *monka* was too old for agricultural use, and redefined it to the status of forest.

In total ignorance of the local property rights, they asked the *fokontany* president to call a village assembly and to announce that the cultivation had to be stopped there. The village president organized this meeting, but during his speech he argued in his own favor, opposing the halt ordered by Fanamby. He wanted his huge investment in this site to be worthwhile, and to continue the plantation there. He intentionally mixed the whole story up with the Durrell project's interdiction to plant in the north, saying that «they »also forbid cultivation in the south. This manipulation ended with the intended popular uproar and some people even left the meeting explaining to everybody who wanted to hear that, Durrell or Fanamby, they do not care any more about the conservation projects and will just do as they like in the future.

Since then the villagers have been pretending to ignore Fanamby and are not concerned at all by their activities in the village. Behind the «scene»the situation is tense. The radius for action by the villagers is very limited, as the village space can easily be monitored. The *fokontany* president initiated and promoted this shifting of the cul-

tivation sites from the north to the south. This is to his political advantage but it coincides also with the intention to please the Durrell trust, showing the Durrell trust and its staff that «conservation» is taken seriously in Soatany. However because of the intervention of Fanamby this has not worked out as well as planned. His ability as *fokontany* president to keep all interfering organizations at an un menacing distance from the locals is at stake. He wants to organize the division of the cultivations to the satisfaction of everybody.

"*Le be ny ala*, [Durrell ?] *le vazaha a donné cette terre ici, ils ne cultivent plus au nord.*" K: *Vous êtes au courant du conflit sur cette terre avec Fanamby?* - "*Non, j'en sais rien.*" (wife of Mister Edwin 2007) Apparently the *fokontany* president has not contested the impression that the planting in the south was allowed as compensation for the abandoned fields in the north near the communal forest. It has been the *le Be ny ala* (Durrell) which has therefore made the proposition to cultivate on this site instead. That Fanamby intervenes and recategorizes this old *monka* as a forest is very upsetting.

How high the tension rose only realized while visiting *Iaban'I'* Emanuelle on his cultivation site. As described above, his cultivation site is one of the sites defined as «forest» by Fanamby. Minutes before our arrival, the Durrell project-car with the responsible of the Durrell project and two assistants had just arrived. They left the car to inspect the site, without being aware that *Iaban'I'* Emanuelle was sitting trembling from fear and hatred in the shadow of some bushes. After a short discussion among themselves, they went back to their car and left. At this time we (Tahiry and me, another notoriously curious *vazaha*) came around and found *Iaban'I'* Emanuelle massacring a small tree with his spade while uttering: "*Je suis désolé C. mais j'en ai besoin pour ma culture!*" followed by the worst invectives against C. [the responsible of the Durrell project], Durrell, Fanamby, and every powerful outsider acting in the village. As we have seen in the second chapter *Iaban'I'* Emanuelle has given his cultivating site near the graveyard to a younger member of his family. He did not want to infuriate the village elders. He preferred to start cultivation on this old *monka* in the south. The limits of action were already tense and almost fully stretched. To secure his needs he had to choose between the anger of the village elders, including his own mother, and the eventual punishment of a «*vazaha* - organisation». The feeling of being controlled and limited in his actions was intensely present. When a helicopter passed over the village, turned and closed in on the newly installed rice paddies of the village, the surprised *fokontany* president played an imagined conversation (on my behalf he was speaking in French): *İci c'est Ankoraobato, on est ici, venez! Et Katharina elle est là!* (he was laughing, the helicopter turned from the village to the rice paddies and closed in) "*Eh, c'est un défrichement ça? -eh, non, c'est une rizière - mais il n'y a pas d'eau, c'est monka! -moi, je dis, venez en janvier, il y en aura de l'eau. - eh, mais c'est pas une rizière ça, il y a pas d'eau.*" This incident shows how present the discussion about the definition of forest is. Is this the clearing of a forest, or only the reinstallation of the old rice paddies, utilized already by the very first settlers of Soatany? The reaction of the *fokontany* president shows how observed and controlled the villagers are starting to feel. Towards all *vazaha* there is felt a basic mistrust and the fear of being caught by

doing something «illegal». "*Le vazaha est strict avec la forêt.*" (Farmer in Malalay) The *Vazaha* in this context has not only the meaning of «white foreigners» but includes also the staff of the different NGO and persons implicated in the conservationist projects. During my first week in the village, Mario, my translator had explained me why the *havtschy* (baobab bark) was hung out to dry by the youngest brother of the *fokontany* president beside his house. As I had never seen this before we casually went closer to inspect it. Mario explained me how it was made, and then turned to get the confirmation from the owner of the house. But everybody seemed to have disappeared. We discussed the incident with the wife of the *fokontany* president. She revealed to us, that the owner of the baobab barks quickly came to her place to investigate our intentions some seconds after we had left. He feared the risk of a denunciation.

To illustrate to what level this interfering can rise on a regular day in the village, I include these notes protocol from my field diary: Thursday, 19.09.2007:

Six o'clock in the morning: the Durrell project car arrives in the village. They are unloading some material for the construction of the forest association office. The responsible of the Durrell project remains in the village to oversee the advancement of the construction of the forest office. (He installs himself cozily on the terrace of the forest association president, after having enjoyed breakfast with the family of the *fokontany* president.) The rest of the Durrell staff and some of CFL are leaving the village with the car to make the regularly inspection tour in the communal forest.

Six minutes later the ZAP responsible comes with his driver on a motorcycle to inspect the school and discuss the replacement of a teacher.

Seven O'clock: The Fanamby –project car comes to the village for the second inspection of the village territory in order to establish the cultivation plan for his year. The *fokontany* president prefers to participate in the meeting of the ZAP. He has sent his younger brother, the president of the forest association, to accompany the Fanamby-biologists.

Around eight o'clock: Niva Cockrell, an American student investigating medicinal plants, demands to make an interview with the local *ombiassy* or healer.

Afternoon: The ZAP-responsible holds a short public conference at the village school, then departs back to Morondava on his motorcycle.

Four o'clock: The Durrell car comes back to the village. A conference of the forest association is held and the results of the inspection are transmitted to the villagers.

All this time, a Swiss social anthropology student with her Malagasy-student translator is sitting on the terrace observing and commenting it all.

It should be emphasized that this was not an exceptional day. The only irregularity was that during the night there was no truck from the regionally logging company coming to the village. Just our project alone used to come to the village on average once a week with a car, to bring in researchers, translators or food. On more special days there were helicopters passing, cars making satellite measurements and political promotion tours coming to the village.

Staying always one step ahead of this tide of visits was not a simple task. It took a lot of skill and ability on the part of the *fokontany* president but this skill is crucial for the village, so as to avoid being rolled over by all this impact. It is not difficult to recognize

that village is integrated in a wide system of exchanges and several different influences. But it is important to be attentive that the ONG coming with cars, material, *vazahas* and questionnaires are just the most visible ones.

"A third theme is that ideological images cannot be understood outside the experience of political domination. However, the relation between power and culture is indirect and requires a long term historical perspective before any attempt can be made at establishing the relation between political and ideological." ([Bloch 1997], p.viii). As I already mentioned in the chapter on research questions the actual representation of the forest cannot be analyzed independent of the actual political situation. Maurice Bloch claims that to really estimate the impact such power relations have, one needs a close overview over a long period. I did not have the time for that only, my attempt to observe and analyze the situation as well as I could during my limited time in the field.

Everything connected to «forest» leads to illegality and insecurity. For the mere subsistence the utilizations of forest products are allowed. But the moment the use of such products is attempted as a way to gain money it is submitted to severe controls and restrictions. Authorizations for transport and sale on regional markets are needed. The discussion of these authorizations was a perennial political issue and hotly debated.

Most importantly, the development the village had achieved on its own, «out of the forest », is officially not recognized at all. The huge investment of all of the villagers migrating to the place and installing their houses and cultivation over the last century, has found no official confirmation. On the contrary, all the projects are initiated with the aim to freeze the village in its current state, where in the conception of the locals no further development is possible. Keller argues that *"biodiversity conservation on the Masoala peninsula leaves local people with a sense of having been defeated in the purpose of life as they understand it."* ([Keller 2004]) The socially valued resource we call «forest» is not exploitable in the form it would bring the most value for them: to become the subsistence land for their children. Through this restriction, it has become impossible to really become rooted to the land, to install the *tjanindrazana* on the village land.

"The Malagasy ethos is based on the ideal of the growth and fruitful continuation of human life, the conservationist ethos is founded on the ideal of a perfect but static, equilibrium between the different species present on our planet" ([Keller 2008]). This «static equilibrium» attempted by conservationist projects like the GCF makes the locals feel as if they were put on hold. This is not a situation they would like to be seen prolonged over a longer period. The cited conversation with the CFL (second chapter) is a reference to this feeling. He is asking, when will the time come when the village can use their communal forest? When will this time of waiting finally be over?

The forest becomes more of a curse. The villagers see it as the legitimation for the many projects interfering with daily life in the village. Most of these projects are taken with good humor, like another annual cyclone that will pass by. But some projects like Fanamby or Durrell have stripped the villagers of an important part of their sovereignty,

and have made them feel their feeble power of negotiation.

"(...) *Kind of ideological picture which emerges from the rituals practiced by people is a vague representation of the world in which fertility, that is the power to create people, plants, wealth is seen as the result of a blessing from the ancestors via the elders, a blessing which is achieved by containing the vitality of nature symbolized by water and the unknown owners of the land, in a container fashioned by men of authority, elders or kings- the elders as the source of all good things*"([Bloch 1997] , p. 131).

These elders, source of all good things, are still transported elsewhere. In the perspective of the village it would be crucial to have them near to be more apt to provide the necessary to achieve the reception of the fertilizing blessing of the ancestors.

3.8.7 «Ces parages sont dangereuses»

We were visiting a family in the hamlet called Fenomaro. This hamlet was about forty minutes walking distance away from the village center. We were invited to share some sweet potatoes by *mama ny* Nadine. A child in teens sat by her side. It was a regular morning and all the children of Soatany were attending their classes.

Non, les enfants ne vont pas à l'école. C'est trop dangereux." K: *"Pourquoi c'est dangereux?"* *"Il y a des voleurs de cœurs dans la forêt. Ils prennent les cœurs des petits enfants et les donnent aux vazaha."* I was told this story in many different variations. I became used to children starting to cry when I appeared, running away, and hiding in the house. Adults became obviously nervous and unsettled by my visits. The more distant from the village center where my visits, the more I was confronted with fear and uncertainty. As Cole had demonstrated: *"Rumors of blood thieves have a long history in Madagascar and have been documented by numerous observers (Althabe 1996, Bloch 1871 b, Blot 1964, Gintzburger 1983 Jarosz 1994, and Molet 1979 in Cole 2001, p. 239). Although versions of the blood-thief story vary, there are a number of common themes. Early versions of the blood-thief rumor held that the thieves were vazaha who stole the hearts and blood of Malagasy children during the night and either ate them or fed them to huge beasts, who gave vazaha their amazing powers."* (Cole 2001, p. 239) Cars are the feature most clearly demonstrating the amazing powers of the *vazaha*. Another clear sign that somebody is endowed with particular forces or ulterior motives is that he or she is up and about during the night. After nightfall, the village is very quiet. Only some very brave villagers such as *Iaban'I'* Emanuelle the hunter dare to leave the security of their village houses during the night. Women who are leaving the house in the night are judged to be witches, man as *dahalo-* (cow-)thieves. One night I tried for ten minutes to persuade my female translator to accompany me to the toilet *monka* just outside the village, and had to give up on it, at no cost was she ready to leave the village during the night.

Once I spent a fortnight in Ranotana, one of the distant hamlets of Soatany, I could hear the accelerations of a 4-wheel drive vehicle in the distance all night long. The noise came nearer and then disappeared again into the distance only to come back some minutes later. In the morning I asked my host family which car I could have heard. *"Ah, ça c'est le Be ny ala"*. [the owner of the forest] The *Be ny ala* in this case is the

Fanamby-car. They are monitoring the cart track representing the frontier between the cultivation zone of the village and the protected forest zone of Andranomena. This night patrols intensive the power represented by the Fanamby organization into an almost superhuman sphere.

"According to the description provided by Maurice Bloch (1971b) heart thieves have black beards, blue eyes and large dogs. But heart thieves are not limited to European vazaha. Rather in keeping the notion that the word vazaha refers to anyone who has acquired the habits and material goods associated with a European way of life, heart thieves may also be found among Malagasies, Particularly functionaries and government agents"([Cole 2001]p.239). Today I would add the agents of the conservation-NGO organizations to this list. We have seen above that they are considered as *vazaha* by the local population. *"Writing of rumors of heart thieves in Madagascar, Lucy Jarosz (1994) notes that "these rumors give voice to the individual and collective anxieties of being drained of life and having the core of the body stolen to feed external forces and powers" Jarosz suggests that rumors of heart thieves construct landscapes of fear"* (Jarosz 1994 p.433 in Cole 2001, p.239).

The people in Soatany do not perceive the NGO- projects as communal projects but rather as actors operating for personal interests. For the other major family, in the village for example, the intervention from the Durrell trust had as a consequence the loss of an important part of their land. *"La forêt est déjà pour les vazaha"* (Father of the vice president in Ranotana 2007), is the usual comment to express this feelings. This stories of the supernatural power the *vazaha* and their grip for the bare life of the villagers were joined by another bundle of common stories concerning the ethnic group the Antandroy.

These stories all treated the ability of the Antandroy to be reawakened after death. When I was there an actual version was told about a boy who had been buried just some weeks before my arrival. He was seen several times by people in the village center and it was a common „secret»that he had been reawakened from death and had been hidden in the forest by his ashamed parents, were afraid that others in the village would notify this reawakening.

Only Antandroy have the ability to be resurrected up to seven times. I was told so many of this stories that I started to become unsure when I met an Antandroy if I was now talking to a living human being or to somebody already dwelling in the realm of the dead. *"Although it would be easy to dismiss the rumors of blood thieves as irrational superstition, many scholars working in Africa have shown that such rumors are highly revealing of political concern: they embody people's inchoate awareness of larger political processes."*([Cole 2001], p.242)

I would argue that these stories mirror two ongoing conflicts in Soatany. The first conflict is between the early families and the newcomers, and this one is reflected by the stories of the Antandroy being resurrected as zombies. The other major issue is the strains between the villagers and the conservation organizations. Reflecting this are the images of heart thieves stealing the future livelihood of the village and carrying it away in their four-wheel vehicles at night. Both conflicts touch spheres of the ut-

most importance for the villagers, and find expression in these stories of heart thieves and zombies. The circulation of these stories is to be taken as a sign of the feeling of revulsion and that dominate many social relation in the village and beyond.

3.9 «Paysages Forestiers du Menabe »

Without the possibility to participate in the PFM- research project, a field study in Madagascar would have not been possibly for me. I benefited enormously from the knowledge, experience and advise of the PFM-research group. I benefited equally from the help and the infrastructure of the CFPF, which made many tasks much easier during my stay. Evidently the direct contact and the establishment of a good relationship with the villagers was important for the PFM research group. As a member of the research group I had an easy entry in the village of Soatany. That was also due to translators who worked there before and were no strangers to the villagers.

I spent only 4 month out of 18 month of the fieldwork duration of the project, in Madagascar and I am aware that I am dealing with experts who know the Central Menabe since a long time. I will mention my social anthropological view of the most important points concerning the PFM- project.

«Deducing potentialities and constants for sustainable management of a landscape with a major forest component»(Project description «les Paysages Forestiers du Menabe».2) To come back to the story with which this note started, what can we conclude about a European research project that perceives the village and its surroundings as: «landscape»with a «major forest component». As I argued above, this is not how rural Malagasies see their environment. The «major forest component»is the concern of us Westerners. The project is in debt to his Western donors and institutions and should deliver suitable information for a Western public. Using a research project on Western definitions is perilous because most important aspects of the problem as perceived by for the locals are being systematically ignored.

The monthly expenditures of the PFM project on a local scale are huge, they exceed by far the amount of money that a rural Malagasy could hope to achieve in a lifetime. The cars, the food, the supplies, the numbers of *vazaha* (foreigner) researchers taking part, the long duration of the project, all of these points are manifestations of the huge investment made for this research project. The visit of Dr. Sorg to Soatany during my stay there was an example for me that the supervisors of the PFM project are not aware of the «shock and awe»impression that their material wealth has on the villagers. This visit influenced my position in the village live noticeably. For the villager this visit was a show of the tremendous power and the unlimited material resources that the PFM project has at its disposal. My attempt to occupy the position of a curios but unimportant observer in the village live, was no more convincing thereafter.

In the view of the villager, face to this overwhelming richness and power they have no choice but to establish a working relationship with their most important neighbor, the CFPF organization. However, it is difficult for the local authorities not to appear poor

and powerless facing such an amount of wealth that they cannot match. The *fokontany* president was well aware of the visit of Dr. Sorg and the research team to Soatany. That he was not present this day was no coincidence.

It was very difficult for me to get information from villagers outside of the family of the *fokontany* President and to talk to people from the hamlet outside the village center. Other researchers in Madagascar experienced similar constraints: *"This is necessary because the most talkative farmers, those who provided me with the longest and more informative citations in the previous section, are the better off. The poorest often remain shy. They hesitate to receive visitors because they are ashamed of having nothing to offer"* ([Pollini 2007], p. 232). Village society is organized very hierarchically. The ones who really rely on forest products are the persons on the lowest level of society and they do not have the right or the ability to talk to important external figures. They are also the ones most scared of talking with a *vazaha*. (a «muted group» in Edwin Ardener's terms 1975, p 2). This is well observable during the village assembly, where persons who talk but do not have the «right» to speak are taunted by the elders during meetings.

In Soatany the persons who sold *trandrakys* could be singled out as the ones who were dependent on forest resources for their livelihood. This concerned the wife of the one Antandroy newcomer living in the village center, and the nephew of *Iaban'I'* Emanuelle who's cultivation was by the graveyard. It took me 10 weeks of playing soccer with the youth of the village until I could approach this cousin and ask if it would eventually be possible to come and see his cultivation site. He still refused then, and only thanks to the persuasion of Tahiry, my translator were we able to spend one morning on his hat-sake. It was equally difficult to approach the people living in the hamlets of Soatany. During some of my visits, I saw real panic in their eyes and a «normal» conversation was just not possible. This situation was quite contrary to the state aim of inclusion of local views into the project.

" (...) specific understanding of stakeholder requirements and strategies will allow drawing an accurate picture of the human-forest interface". (Dirac, Anriambelo and Sorg 2006, p. 31)

To get information about strategies pursued by stakeholders is very difficult by means of questionnaires. To use direct observation during several stays in the village, to use scoring and other methods practiced by the research group, is a step into the good direction, because often long term and tortuous strategies cannot be easily understood. One of the basic and safest strategies for the villagers is to tell the researcher what he/she wants to hear. For the villager the PFM project is clearly a project of the CFPPF. This perception is founded on some very clear indications from a villager's point of view: Monsieur Sorg just like a traditional «owner» of the CFPPF forest, he was the responsible person in the background, all the researchers came with the official CFPPF cars to the village, the whole project was about forest products and cultivation. The CFPPF is an intimidating organization for the villagers. I use the example of the discussion with one of the *contrôleur de la forêt locale*, to demonstrate their feelings towards the CFPPF: *"Il demande le nom de l'organisation avec laquelle collabore, si c'est le Centre professionnel pour la formation forestière (CFPPF)?" - "Il a demandé ça parce*

que comme ça il a peur de nous... parce que les gens des fois, ils ont peur des étrangers, ils ont peur des gens qui travaillent à Soatany c'est pour ça qu'il voulait demander si on travaille avec le CFPF et comment exactement se passe cette collaboration....-pour connaître un peu mieux." To show that there is more to this statement than the normal fear of the *vazaha* I cite Fauroux who draws in his article: "La forêt dans les systèmes de production ouest-malgaches" the same conclusion concerning the impression of the CFPF (as a institution of the coopération Suisse). "(...) libre accès à la forêt" (cela excluait les forêts au nord de la Morondava, strictement contrôlées par les institutions liées à la coopération suisse) ([Fauroux 2002], p.16). Some of the CFPF cars have orange license plates – indicating the cars of state agents. The relation with the state makes the CFPF an even more important organization considered by the locals as one of the controllers of their behavior towards conservation measures.

But it is also true that once the villagers get to know the researcher personally they make their own judgment about each person and his intentions towards the village. This shows how very important it is to continue to install a good longtime relation to the villagers. The researcher is like an intruder in their live, as they had not requested for a survey of their livelihood therefore whether their behavior towards the forest and the environment could be classified as sustainable. What they perceived was the huge investment of a state project. All they had to do was make the researchers comfortable in the village so that the results would coming out to their advantage. On my final tour to inform the villagers of my looming departure, the father of the *fokuntany* president told me: "On espère que tu vas être remplacé bientôt par une autre *vazaha*."

The aim of the PFM project was already defined before the research begun. The forest was to be preserved. The researchers were not questioning the «if», but looking at «how» this could be achieved. Here the troubling question of Muttenger becomes pressing in: "– "Mais combien, parmi les agences occidentales d'aide environnementale, sont prêtes à reconnaître le droit coutumier des Malgaches à défricher 100'000 hectares de forêts naturelles? –Aucune à vrai dire. Déguisée de manière plus ou moins explicite en indigénisation du modèle domanial importée, la «gouvernance» cache une occidentalisation encore plus profonde du dispositif d'administration environnementale" (Muttenger 2007, p.111)

The real aims of the villagers, as I perceived them, go in a quite different direction. Rather the status that quite reasonably, they worry about, they are going to achieve in their own social system. The issues of ancestors, and how to become one, are the ones motivating the primary local actors. The only real question thus is for them, if ever they would be given the chance to become ancestors in Soatany once.

Once this conservation site will be established it will be important to consider that this forest represents a possibility of expansion for the locals. The denial of this possibility will be badly received and considered as a refusal to the local ambitions. The people of Soatany are subsistence farmers, and they are proud of their fields and their ability to sustain themselves. The primary concern of the villagers is to gain formal recognition of the existence of their village and its location. The state and the NGO's are expected to proceed to attribute valid land titles for the already settled part of what is still

officially forest land. Only in this way can the inhabitants of Soatany escape their precarious situation and become real associates. Legal recognition of their current situation would provide security and change the status of the people from one in which their presence is seen as merely troublesome to the forest, to one where their interests as stakeholders, negotiating their share in a project affecting the future of the village and themselves is acknowledged.

If «improving the livelihood of the locals» is meant seriously it will be important to provide a substitute for their agricultural expansion representing the same economical and social prestige like farming and zebu raising for the locals. In Soatany the conflict between the newcomers and the established families in the village center, is what dominates the situation at the moment. There is no open conflict line whatsoever, but the situation could heat up when more migrants arrive, and any other possibility of expansion is barred. They will be in need for some form of official help for handling this situation.

The pressure on the locals concerning conservation measures is already felt as enormous. To simply add conservation measures aggravates the situation for the locals, and the conservation measures will be regarded with more resentment and incomprehension. Before simply adding more pressure to a situation which is already tense, it is important to open up alternatives.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, there are so many projects and researchers coming to the village that handling these projects is almost a fulltime job. The village people working for all the NGO's have become «project-wise» and are very skilled and professional in the ways in which they attract this kind of foreign investment and integrate this money into their local economy. Further the village society is very hierarchically organized, often only the local elite benefits from the projects which are then derived to serve their interests. This social structure should be considered in any project outline and also considered when treating the results.

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.1 Madagascar



Figure 2: <http://madagascar.mongabay.net/map.htm>

.2 Village and outlying area



Figure 3: Mapp design Mario Ramohavelo, Katharina Lindenmann, President of *focontany*, the wife of the *focontany* president, her daughter, vice president of the *focontany*, others.

.3 Village center



Figure 4: Map design: Katharina Lindenmann. Colors reflect family relations.



Figure 5: Car track into the communal forest of Soatany. The small tree in the foreground has been felled to block the road.



Figure 6: Inside the forest, because of the green lianes called forest of Marovahy



Figure 7: The Bemoky forest in the north- east of the village