

<b>Zeitschrift:</b>	Tsantsa : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Ethnologischen Gesellschaft = revue de la Société suisse d'ethnologie = rivista della Società svizzera d'etnologia
<b>Herausgeber:</b>	Schweizerische Ethnologische Gesellschaft
<b>Band:</b>	14 (2009)
<b>Artikel:</b>	Who are "they"? : Local understandings of NGO and state power in Masoala, Madagaskar
<b>Autor:</b>	Keller, Eva
<b>DOI:</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1007317">https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1007317</a>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 06.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# WHO ARE «THEY»?

## LOCAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF NGO AND STATE POWER IN MASOALA, MADAGASCAR

### ABSTRACT

In the wake of a global surge in biodiversity conservation activities, Madagascar has become subjected to «global environmental governance» with foreign NGOs playing a key role in this development. This article investigates how farmers who live next to a national park in Madagascar conceptualise new forms of conservation-oriented power. I show that, in contrast to conservationists, farmers do not think about the park in terms of conservation issues but rather in terms of the relationships between local people and outside powers, both Malagasy and foreign. In their intellectual analysis of the present situation, farmers make use of their understanding and memories of history, particularly that of the colonial period, thus connecting the present to the past. This leads some of them to ponder over fundamental issues of social life such as the nature of servitude.

**Keywords:** Representations of Nature Conservation · Global Environmentalism · National Parks · Madagascar · Slavery

### EVA KELLER

Many countries of the South have over the course of the past few decades become what Graham Harrison calls «governance states» (2004). A governance state is characterised by the high degree of influence coming from external global actors and implies the partial loss of its own sovereignty when it comes to determining national politics. As many analysts have persuasively argued, Madagascar can be considered such a case with international concerns for biodiversity conservation – combined with the country's high level of indebtedness to industrialised nations and monetary institutions – playing the key role in this development (see, for example, Duffy 2006; Pollini 2007; Rabesahala Horning 2008).

Madagascar is characterised by extraordinarily high levels of biodiversity and endemism of animal and plant species. At the same time, Malagasy habitats for rare fauna and flora are thought by the international conservation community to be at a high and immediate risk of destruction primarily because of local people's subsistence activities, in particular the cultivation of hill rice. Madagascar has thus been designated as one of the most important global «hot spots» for biodiversity and is thought to require particularly urgent attention from conservation actors. The island is presented to audiences throughout the world as a natural paradise that, however, has already been almost completely

destroyed by its human occupants since their arrival in Madagascar some 2000 years ago. Although the «lost paradise thesis» has been shown to be a misrepresentation by a number of scientists from fields such as paleoecology, archaeology and geography (see Burney 1997, 2005; Dewar 1997; Kull 2004), it continues to provide the paradigm for justifying international intervention<sup>1</sup>. Since the mid-1980s, the Malagasy government has been under tremendous pressure to implement a strict conservation policy. Madagascar can, then, be considered as subject to «global environmental governance» (Duffy 2006: 731; see also Kull 2004: 238ff.; Mercier 2006; Pollini 2007: 58ff., 410ff.) – and perhaps even to «ecocracy» (Broch-Due 2000: 14).

Particularly striking in Madagascar is the exceptionally important role of global nature conservation NGOs. These have considerable lobbying power with important donors (Duffy 2006; Pollini 2007: 410ff.) and played a key role in, for example, the Malagasy president's recent decision to commit himself to more than triple the extension of Protected Areas in the country within just a few years (Duffy 2006: 741ff.; see also Kremen et al. 2008: 224)

The sharing of political power between the Malagasy government, on the one hand, and foreign, conservation-oriented actors, on the other, is reflected and visible in

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Conservation International 2007.

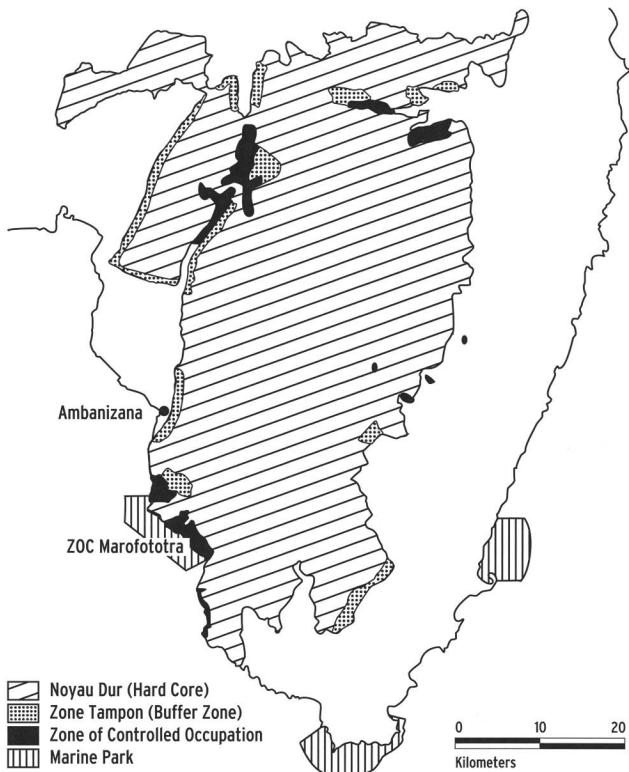
the way many of the country's Protected Areas are managed on the ground. Among these is the Masoala National Park on the island's northeast coast where I conducted fieldwork in two villages<sup>2</sup>. In this article I examine how local subsistence farmers, who are the key target group for conservation measures in Madagascar, analyse and interpret this new form of political power. I show that, in contrast to conservationists, farmers do not think about the park in terms of conservation issues but rather in terms of the relationships between local people and outside powers, both Malagasy and foreign. In their intellectual effort to understand the situation they find themselves confronted with, they use their understanding of history and of past and present relations between ruling powers and themselves as key tools for analysis.

## THE MASOALA NATIONAL PARK

The Masoala National Park is one of Madagascar's largest Protected Areas. During the preparatory years leading up to its creation in 1997, the New York-based NGO «Wildlife Conservation Society» (WCS) was already playing a crucial role in the realisation of the park project (Hatchwell 2003; Ormsby 2003: 62f.). Scientists working for WCS were also highly influential in determining the exact size and location of the park (see Kremen et al. 1999). Since the year 2000 WCS has been directly involved in the official co-management of the park, together with the Malagasy National Protected Areas Agency, ANGAP (*Association nationale pour la gestion des aires protégées*)<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, WCS is the key sponsor of the park. It is in turn funded through a number of institutions committed to biodiversity conservation including Zurich Zoo which provides between a quarter and a third of the overall running costs of the park<sup>4</sup>.

The Masoala National Park consists of three principal types of zones (see Figure 1) in which different regulations apply concerning access and the exploitation of natural resources. The bulk of the park is designated as Hard Core (*Noyau dur*). Local people are not permitted to enter the Hard Core except when authorised to do so on special

Figure 1 (Map provided by ANGAP Maroantsetra, modified by Eva Keller)



occasions by ANGAP. Certain areas along the park's edges are designated Buffer Zones (*Zones tampons*) inside of which the local population is allowed to use the natural resources in specified, sustainable ways. The third type of zone represents inhabited enclaves inside the park called *Zones d'occupation contrôlée* or ZOCs. Marofotora, one of the villages where I conducted fieldwork, is one such ZOC.

## CHALLENGING PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOODS

Marofotora was created in 2001 as part of a resettlement programme instigated by the park authorities. Prior to the park's existence, Marofotora's approximately 360 inhabit-

<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork was conducted for a total of nine months in the villages of Ambanizana and Marofotora between 2005 and 2008. Prior to this research involving the Masoala National Park, I conducted 20 months of fieldwork on another topic in two locations directly adjacent to the Masoala peninsula (see Keller 2005).

<sup>3</sup> ANGAP is a semi-private association that was created in 1990 in the wake of a National Environmental Action Plan; it was commissioned by the Malagasy government to manage the country's Protected Areas. In 2007 the management of Protected Areas was reorganised and now involves other bodies besides ANGAP. At the time of writing, the Masoala National Park is still co-managed by ANGAP and WCS.

<sup>4</sup> The zoo provides between \$100,000-\$150,000 per year in support of the Masoala National Park (Rübel and Hatchwell 2003: 20; General meeting of the association «Freunde Masoalas», Zoo Zurich, 30.9.2004; Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 18.9.2008).

ants used to live in dispersed hamlets located within the nearby forest. All of the families of Marofototra, except one, are first or second generation migrants who came to the area to create a livelihood cultivating hill rice for subsistence and vanilla for cash. Because this particular stretch of the rainforest is considered to be of outstanding importance for conservation goals, it was included within the boundary of the park and the area's inhabitants were relocated from their hamlets to the new village of Marofototra which now forms the core of the ZOC of the same name. The enclave includes the new village and the old hamlets which are now in the process of decay (they lie about an hour's walking distance from the village) as well as most of the local people's agricultural land (some fields, however, were included within the Hard Core). Marofototra's inhabitants are allowed to continue to cultivate their arable land already in use inside the ZOC but only in ways considered sustainable by the park authorities. In particular the cultivation of hill rice, which necessitates the burning of bush vegetation or trees, is considered the main culprit for deforestation by conservationists and has, since the creation of the village, not been authorised regularly.

The other village where I worked is called Ambanizana. Ambanizana is much larger than Marofototra and it looks back on a history of at least one hundred years having been founded at the end of the nineteenth century by migrants from further north. The village lies at the mouth of a big river and people make their living primarily by cultivating wet rice (which, in contrast to hill rice, is considered unproblematic by conservationists). The production of hill rice represents an additional potential resource for poor families and, indeed, for everyone during difficult times. In contrast to Marofototra, Ambanizana is not located inside but at the periphery of the park, a relatively short distance from its boundary. Even so, twenty-five per cent of the village's population depends entirely or partially on cash and food crops produced on land that now lies inside the park. This land consists of small pieces of cleared forest, mostly plots not exceeding one or two hectares in size, on which people grow vanilla, cloves and coffee, which are for selling, as well as hill rice, manioc, sweet potatoes, bananas, pineapples, sugarcane and other crops for consumption. Because ANGAP (the Parks Agency) has up to now been unable to offer any compensation for what the villagers have lost, either in cash or in kind, the people of Ambanizana have been given unofficial permission to continue to cultivate their land inside the park for the time being, with the exception of producing hill rice, however. They have still lost the ownership of their

own land, though<sup>5</sup>, as the current situation is one in which they are simply temporarily tolerated as cultivators. The threat of losing their land entirely and definitively hangs over the farmers' heads like the sword of Damocles.

In both villages – and this is perhaps the most far-reaching effect of the park's creation – the extension of agriculturally productive land can no longer be expanded as this would imply the clearing of forest, something which is strictly forbidden under present law. This means that uncleared forest that people have been keeping in reserve for their children and grandchildren can no longer be transformed into agricultural land. This puts the long-term livelihood chances of the families living in Marofototra and Ambanizana at serious risk (cf. Ghimire 1994; Harper 2002).

In Ambanizana as well as in Marofototra, ANGAP has an office normally staffed by three men who live permanently in the villages. Their main duties are to keep the park boundary properly marked (this is done by putting red paint on trees), to regularly go on patrol in the forest in order to check on illicit activities such as the cultivation of hill rice or the felling of trees for the construction of canoes, and to sensitize the villagers to the importance of forest conservation. ANGAP staff also have the right and the obligation to punish people for the infraction of park rules or, in serious cases, report them to superior authorities. ANGAP staff are never local people because it is understood that if they had to keep watch on and possibly report on their own relatives, this would never happen. They are relatively frequently replaced (normally every three to four years) which also makes it clear that theirs is primarily a surveillance role; the development of close ties with local people is avoided by means of this frequent rotation, a practice that is common in Madagascar in, for example, the police force.

Though park staff often stay in their offices doing rather little that is recognisable as work to local farmers, they may turn up anywhere, anytime, catching villagers red-handed selling dried sea cucumbers or eating sea turtle, for example, both of which are strictly forbidden. For the people of Ambanizana and Marofototra, the continual presence of ANGAP staff within their living space creates a strong sense of being under surveillance. When I asked people in Marofototra why they thought that ANGAP had made them move to the new village, many responded: «So that they can watch us»; some emphasised these words with mimes of their hands or arms being tied together.

<sup>5</sup> This is a situation of legal pluralism in which locally defined ownership rules are not recognised by the state or the park authorities.

## «THEY» HAVE COME TO TAKE OUR LAND

From the perspective of the people who live in Marofotra and Ambanizana, the park has become their enemy, an enemy that is trying to take away the basis of their livelihood (*fivelômana*). This is not just because the park's creation has entailed the loss of economically valuable soil; local people have also become immensely constrained in terms of creating what for them, as for farmers elsewhere in Madagascar, represents a successful life. The core of a successful life, as they understand it, is the continuation of the process of becoming ever more rooted in the land, a process started by one's ancestors in the past when they first arrived in Masoala. The generation of a growing number of descendants who will continue this process is perhaps local people's most important aim in life. Access to forest that has not yet been claimed by anyone and that can be transformed into a source of life – in the sense of producing food and in the sense of continuing life through one's descendants – is an essential aspect of this process through which a kin group's roots in its «land of the ancestors» progressively deepen over a long period of time (see Keller 2008).

During my stay in Ambanizana and Marofotra, statements such as «They [zare] have come to take our land» or «They have thrown us out» were endlessly repeated, sometimes in response to questions of mine and sometimes unprompted by any such probing. There was a clear feeling that they were being invaded by outsiders, that they were being invaded by a new form of power. But, who are these outsiders, who are «they»?

### *Who will own Masoala?*

One morning in Ambanizana, the village leaders called the population to come and listen to a public speech to be delivered by a group of government representatives who had arrived from town. The group included two *gendarmes*, the district's new head representative for the Ministry of Water and Forests as well as Roland<sup>6</sup>, a senior ANGAP member of staff. As was customary at this sort of occasion, the villagers – about two hundred people this time – gathered in a wide circle around the vice-mayor's house from whose veranda the speeches were to be delivered. Things were said about the importance of conserving the forest – that there would be no development without it; that Madagascar once used to be all «green» but was increasingly turning into «red soil»; and that the forest's protection would bring Madagascar lots of dollars and euros. Things were

also said about the importance of everyone obtaining both a birth certificate and an identity card, about the necessity of obtaining authorisation before planting hill rice and about the government's and the police force's job of caring for and protecting all the area's inhabitants. At the end of the speeches those present were invited to ask questions. The first question was posed by Koto, one of the best-educated people in the village, who had heard on the radio, just the night before, that the Masoala National Park was soon going to be declared a world heritage (*patrimoine mondial*). Did this mean, he wanted to know, that the land inside the park would no longer belong to Madagascar? The question was answered by Roland in the following way: «The park becoming a patrimoine mondial does not mean that it will belong to the countries abroad (*tsy ho lasa andafy*), it means that the forest here is the wealth (*harena*) not only of Madagascar, but of the whole world. We are very lucky, because the population around the park will therefore not be forgotten, but cared for, by the world and the government.»

This was the first time that the term *patrimoine mondial* had been widely heard in the village and the news was received by those listening with a mixture of uncertainty and worry as to what exactly this would imply. Roland's answer had not been clear. Though many could make sense of the word *mondial*, *patrimoine* meant nothing to the vast majority. As a result, in the course of the next days and weeks, the expression was transformed into *parc mondial*. This made more sense; everyone knew what a *parc* was – a space which local people could not freely enter any longer. In the course of the next months and over the following year, during which time the Masoala National Park was indeed declared (in June 2007) a UNESCO World Heritage Site, local people voiced a number of interpretations as to what the park becoming a *parc mondial* really meant and what it would entail. These interpretations, though diverse in terms of their nuances, all carried the same message: the land would no longer belong to Madagascar, or to Madagascar alone, but to the whole world and especially to the *vazaha*. *Vazaha* is a word used throughout Madagascar to refer to any foreigner but is typically used to denote white Europeans and Americans. The *vazaha*, the nations «beyond the sea» (*andafy*), would manage, and possibly own, the peninsula's forests. Perhaps they would buy Masoala from the Malagasy central government or share the exploitation of the forest's riches, especially its precious woods, with the government? Some even feared the possible eviction of local people from cer-

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of the name of my research assistant, all personal names that appear in this article are pseudonyms.

tain areas of Masoala. The whole discourse was coloured by a combination of fear and uncertainty – uncertainty as to *what* would happen and as to *who* would do what.

### Will «slavery» return?

While the loss of Madagascar's sovereignty over the peninsula was perceived as a real threat by almost everyone I talked to, Papan' i Lucien expressed an even more drastic fear. Papan' i Lucien is a thin and frail man probably close to ninety years old and he remembers much of the twentieth century. When he was young, he fulfilled his *corvée* duties (forced labour) under the supervision of the French army. I talked a lot with Papan' i Lucien about the past and one day he told his son and me about how their family came to live in Ambanizana: «At first, we were living close to today's village of Marofototra. There was a *vazaha* [a colon] who owned the land around there. <Those of you who don't want to work for me>, he said, <go away from here. You are not allowed to stay here.> And so people left. My father didn't work for him. He was independent. He didn't want to become a *maromita*. And so we moved to Ambanizana.»

*Maromita* (probably from the French *marmiton*, kitchen boy), Papan' i Lucien explained, was simply another word for «slave» (*andeko*). The French had introduced the word *maromita* because they did not like the word «slave» but, Papan' i Lucien insisted, a *maromita* was simply a slave with a different name. «It's the same with the park!» he continued, without, up to that point, any probing on my part on that issue. «All the people have been thrown out! Yes. They do the same», later on in our conversation adding that «their work kills people». Like everyone else in Ambanizana and Marofototra who I spoke to, Papan' i Lucien used the word «they» in this and in other conversations we had as a label for all those who have come to Masoala in connection with the park, using the words they, ANGAP, the *vazaha*, the *parc* interchangeably.

«I think», he ended his reflections, «that *fañandevôzana* will come back». *Fañandevôzana* literally means «the act of enslaving»<sup>7</sup>; here it can be translated as «slavery». «*Fañandevôzana* will come back», Papan' i Lucien repeated several times. «How can there be ashes in your house, if you are not allowed to go into the forest to get firewood? What will you eat? If it is the nature of this park to imprison this land, I am sure that slavery will come back very soon.» In Masoala the term *fañandevôzana* is mainly used in connection with the French colonial era but people also use it

to refer to the harshness their ancestors experienced under pre-colonial political regimes. Thus *fañandevôzana* does not primarily denote a particular historical period but rather a status or a life-situation. It denotes a situation in which one is prohibited from working for the fruitful continuation of one's own kin group, instead being forced to work for the prosperity of others (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1991: 22, 442). *Fañandevôzana* refers to the interruption of the productive process of life which links together ancestors, living people and future generations of descendants through the process of deepening and expanding one's roots in the land (see Keller 2008). Such a situation is triggered, foremost, by the loss of control over agricultural land, which is the basis of people's livelihood. In Papan' i Lucien's narrative, then – as in the words of other people I have not cited here – the park is feared as something that could provoke the return of *fañandevôzana*.

### WHO ARE «THEY»?

These ethnographic examples make it clear that, from the perspective of people living in Ambanizana and Marofototra, there is no clear answer to the question: «Who are <they>? Who are those people who have come to appropriate the land on the Masoala peninsula?» If one were to paraphrase local people, they would say something like this: «ANGAP, whose staff are all Malagasy, is watching us and they work together with the *gendarmes* and the tribunal in town in punishing those who engage in what they call illegal activities. At the same time, we think that it is the *vazaha* (foreigners) who pay for the park and that it is they who make the real decisions. The one thing we know for sure is that the park threatens our livelihood in that it takes the land away from us, the land on which our future depends.» In people's discourse about the park, then, the word «they» represents a somewhat nebulous and ominous coalition of powerful outsiders, both state-related and foreign. I will discuss these two aspects in turn beginning with the state.

Masoala is a very remote area that can only be reached on foot or by boat. As in other such isolated regions of the country, the state has been all but absent since the end of French colonial rule (Cole 2001: 234f.; Covell 1987: 88). Although in every village a handful of people are elected as government representatives, people's daily lives and affairs, prior to the creation of the park, were subject to government control only to a very limited extent. By the same

<sup>7</sup> «Action de réduire en esclavage ou de traiter en esclave, le service des esclaves» (Abinal and Malzac 1993: 38).

token, communities on the Masoala peninsula have hardly benefited from government programs intended to advance economic and other opportunities for local populations.

With the creation of the park, people have experienced a sudden resurfacing of the state in their lives. First, by declaring the bulk of the Masoala peninsula as out of bounds, the state has set tight limits on people's ability to create agricultural land. Second, the state has marked its presence by stationing its representatives, that is ANGAP staff, in the villages, among them Ambanizana and Marofotra, where it considers that people's activities need to be monitored. Third, the state has issued new legal codes aimed at the protection of the natural environment. One of these is a national law, the *Code de gestion des aires protégées*, which incorporates truly draconian measures (immense fines and years of imprisonment) for infractions such as the felling of trees or the cultivation of hill rice inside any Protected Area of the country<sup>8</sup>. Many people in Ambanizana and Marofotra have vaguely heard about this law's existence and the fact that it is incredibly harsh without knowing its actual content. Its effects, however, have been felt dramatically. Within the first three years of the Code's existence (2005-2008), seven young men from Ambanizana had been sentenced to weeks, months and, in two cases, years in prison. Most of them were guilty of having cleared a small piece of secondary forest in order to grow rice and other crops for their families.

In Marofotra, there exists another code, this time local but still legally binding, whose overall aim is to stop the present population from transforming any more forest into agricultural land and to prevent further population growth. This code is called a Dina and was established in 2002<sup>9</sup>, shortly after the village was created. The Dina regulates the permitted and prohibited activities within the *Zone d'occupation contrôlée* of Marofotra, particularly with regard to residence (with the exception of in-marrying spouses, no new residents are allowed to settle in Marofotra), agricultural work and the exploitation of natural resources. The Dina also includes rules obliging the residents to supervise its own implementation and to report the perpetrators of infractions to ANGAP.

<sup>8</sup> *Code de gestion des aires protégées*: Law No 2001-05, February 11, 2003 (in particular articles 44, 45 and 61) and application decree No 2005-013, January 11, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> A Dina is a traditional juridical institution present in many parts of Madagascar typically used for dealing with theft and other such problems in a local context (cf. Woolley 2002). In Madagascar, the appropriation of locally-based juridical systems for the purposes of government administration and control goes back to the early nineteenth century (see Bloch 1971).

<sup>10</sup> Because I have worked in this area for many years, speak the local dialect and do not stay with ANGAP as all the other foreigners do, instead living with a local family, and also because I do not go into the park to watch the lemurs, it was clearly understood in both villages that I was and am not associated with the park.

Turning to the other aspect of who «they» refers to, not only has the state returned to Masoala, so have the *vazaha* who once ruled Madagascar and who, many local people fear, have now come back to appropriate Malagasy soil once again. As an extraordinarily interesting region in terms of biodiversity, Masoala has attracted many different types of Europeans and Americans in recent years. People ranging from natural scientists to Peace Corps volunteers to tourists<sup>10</sup>, have made an appearance. Some of these visitors, including the director of Zurich Zoo, came to Ambanizana or Marofotra in support of the Masoala National Park. However, it is far from clear to local people what all these *vazaha* are up to and what, exactly, it is that they are looking for in the forest (cf. Walsh 2004, 2005). Do they really just look around and take photographs or are they looking for gold and precious stones? And what exactly are the intentions of those called *serser* (*chercheurs*) who appear to be collecting leaves and insects? More confusion resulted from people being confronted with a jumble of words such as *WCS*, *ONG*, *Zoo de Zurich* or *Banque Mondiale*, and many would have difficulties deciding whether these refer to some kind of association, to names of individual people or to towns and villages abroad. There are also now three tourist lodges on the peninsula's west coast, located between Ambanizana and Marofotra. All three are owned and run by foreigners. «The *vazaha* don't forget the places they like», Papan'i Lucien commented thus making a connection between these hotels and the colonial era during which a number of French *colons* owned logging companies in the area, extracting large quantities of precious wood from the forest.

Who is responsible for the park, then? Who are «they»? From the local people's perspective, there is no clear answer. It is generally feared that Madagascar will lose part of its territory to the *vazaha* because of forest conservation. At the same time, though, conservation is enforced by ANGAP and the Malagasy state. Thus the state seems to have joined forces with the *vazaha* in taking control over the Masoala peninsula at the expense of local people's livelihood.

Indeed, it is not surprising that «the park» has come to represent both the state and foreign rule from the perspective of those who are at the receiving end of conservation

policy. If one thinks back on the speeches delivered that morning in Ambanizana, one notices that ANGAP turned up together with representatives of the police force. Moreover, the group's talk to the assembled village population covered topics relating to forest conservation and the involvement of the countries abroad in this as well as to state control (the necessity of identity cards for example). Also, in answering the question as to the consequences of the park becoming a *patrimoine mondial*, the ANGAP employee highlighted the care for the local population to be provided, jointly, by the government and «the world».

It is, in fact, questionable whether for the farmers of Ambanizana and Marofotra there is all that much difference between the power of the central Malagasy government (*fanjakana*) and that of the *vazaha*. Both re-present the «outside» and are felt to be alien to life in the villages. In many rural places in Madagascar, including Masoala, the main feeling associated with the government is distrust and fear. The state is perceived, above all, as an unwanted body of control and, at times, coercion, as «something essentially alien, predatory» (Graeber 2007: 21; cf. Cole 2001: 63). Moreover, in the island's coastal regions people's largely negative view of the central government is enhanced because of the latter being associated with the pre-colonial Merina empire (Cole 2001: 40ff., 293ff.). The Merina are a group who live around the capital city in the central highlands of the country and they controlled most of Madagascar, including the area around Masoala, during most of the nineteenth century. The antagonism between the Merina and the *côtiers* (people from the coasts) has been used as a key political tool by both the French and by Malagasy political leaders since independence, so this antagonism has remained vivid and real for many Malagasy citizens. In local discourses in Masoala, the era of the pre-colonial Merina kingdom is represented as a time of exploitation and great brutality equal to that of colonial times. The central government, with its seat in the old Merina capital in the highlands, is often considered a continuation of Merina power and for this reason people in such places as Ambanizana and Marofotra expect little of the government except the exploitation of the coastal regions. The park has made these feelings even stronger. Thus, in Masoala, the notion of «foreignness» does not only apply to *vazaha* (foreigners); it also applies, in certain ways, to the Malagasy central government. A couple of times, I have even heard people refer to the Merina as *vazaha* and to their dialect as «the language of the *vazaha*», an expression which normally means «French» (cf. Cole 2001: 240).

When Papan' i Lucien reflects on the park he, like everyone else, perceives a bewildering coalition of governmental and non-Malagasy outside powers that are threatening local

people's livelihoods. Like some other old people, he also fears that the park might entail the return of *fañandevôzana* (slavery), that is a life-situation in which one is not free to work towards the long-term future and prosperity of one's kin, in this case because one has lost control over the land. Indeed, it is precisely the Merina, with whom the central Malagasy government is still associated, and the *vazaha*, the foreigners from «beyond the sea», who, in local people's representation of history, brought *fañandevôzana* to Masoala at different times in the past. These two groups have now jointly returned to Masoala and their respective intentions are thought to be identical, so much so that they merge in local people's understanding of the park into one, hostile, «other» – into «they». «They» as opposed to, and against, «us».

## CONCLUSIONS

Since the mid-1980s, the protection of Madagascar's extraordinary biodiversity has become one of the government's key political priorities. This is primarily due to international pressure. This situation has implied both the strengthening of the state's role in conservation-targeted areas such as Masoala and the state's simultaneous partial loss of sovereignty in determining its political agenda. The influence of globally active conservation NGOs has been of tremendous significance in this development.

In Masoala the Wildlife Conservation Society has played a crucial role in promoting and realising the Masoala National Park, one of the largest Protected Areas in the country. This article's contribution has been to investigate how local farmers, who are the key target group for conservation measures in Masoala, analyse and interpret the new form of conservation-oriented power that they are now confronted with. In their analysis of the situation, farmers fail to pinpoint the nature of this new power. In particular, they do not clearly distinguish between the role of the Malagasy government and that of WCS and other foreign conservation bodies active in the region, instead considering these to be different aspects of a hostile coalition whose intention it is to take control over the land. Two conclusions can be drawn from this.

First, in many ways, local people's representation of the various kinds of Malagasy and non-Malagasy actors involved in the park as «they» directly reflects what Duffy (2006), following Harrison (2004), calls «global environmental governance». It reflects a situation in which the Malagasy government enforces, through ANGAP and the apparatus of the state, a foreign-determined conservation agenda and in which the respective roles of the government and of global

environmental politics are controversial (see Duffy 2006). In other words, the farmers of Ambanizana and Marofototra are confused because the situation is confusing.

Second, in their intellectual efforts to understand the nature of the power they feel their lives are being invaded by, local people go beyond the immediate issue of the park. News of the park becoming a *patrimoine mondial* triggered fears that parts of Madagascar might once again become controlled by foreigners. When Papan'i Lucien reflects about the park, his mind travels back to the colonial period during which he was subjected to what he considers to have been slavery (*fañandevôzana*). While ANGAP and WCS talk about the forest, the lemurs and the coral reefs, the people of Ambanizana and Marofototra talk about Malagasy independence, colonialism, the Merina empire and state control. Thus local people do not primarily think about the park in terms of conservation issues, but rather in terms of the relationships between the people of Masoala and various outside powers. These relationships are reflected upon with the help of local people's understandings and memories of history which both serve as key tools for the analysis of the present situation. Moreover, thinking about the park not only leads people to reflect on external dominance and possible signs of the return of some form of colonialism; it also makes some of them, among them Papan'i Lucien, ponder over fundamental issues of social life such as the nature of servitude and slavery.

Social scientists share with the Malagasy farmers the understanding that the present is always linked to the past and that creating a Protected Area involves much more than promoting ecology. This, however, is rarely recognised in conservation politics. The Masoala National Park, at least, is presented by conservation actors to the local population and to audiences beyond Madagascar as a historically isolated entity whose success will primarily depend on the educating of local farmers about the park's immediate purpose of conserving the peninsula's biodiversity. For the latter, however, such a perspective is much too short-sighted. If they had access to these audiences, local people would insist on the analysis of the inequalities of power and the lessons of history.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research on which this article is based was financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF). I warmly thank my research assistant HARIMALALA Paul Clément for his invaluable help during fieldwork as well as Maurice Bloch for his insightful input during the preparation of this text. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers from *Tsantsa* for their constructive comments on an earlier draft of this article, as well as Oliver Woolley for his linguistic services.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABINAL and MALZAC

1993 (1888). *Dictionnaire Malgache-Français*. Fianarantsoa (Madagascar): Ambozontany.

BLOCH Maurice

1971. «Decision-Making in Councils Among the Merina of Madagascar», in: Audrey RICHARDS, Adam KUPER (Eds), *Councils in Action*, p. 29-62. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BROCH-DUE Vigdis

2000. «Producing Nature and Poverty in Africa: An Introduction», in: Vigdis BROCH-DUE, Richard A. SCHROEDER (Eds), *Producing Nature and Poverty in Africa*, p. 9-52. Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute.

BURNEY David A.

1997. «Theories and Facts Regarding Holocene Environmental Change Before and After Human Colonization», in: Steven M. GOODMAN, Bruce P. PATTERSON (Eds), *Natural Change and Human Impact in Madagascar*, p. 75-89. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

2005. «Finding the Connections between Paleoecology, Ethnobotany, and Conservation in Madagascar». *Ethnobotany Research and Applications* 3: 385-389.

COLE Jennifer

2001. *Forget Colonialism? Sacrifice and the Art of Memory in Madagascar*. Berkeley /etc.: University of California Press.

CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

2007. «Madagascar and the Indian Ocean Islands, Human Impacts». Electronic document: [www.biodiversityhotspots.org/xp/Hotspots/madagascar/Pages/impacts.aspx](http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org/xp/Hotspots/madagascar/Pages/impacts.aspx), accessed Feb. 15, 2008.

COVELL Maureen

1987. *Madagascar. Politics, Economics and Society*. London / New York: Frances Pinter.

DEWAR Robert E.

1997. «Were People Responsible for the Extinction of Madagascar's Dubfossils, and How will we ever Know?», in: Steven M. GOODMAN, Bruce P. PATTERSON (Eds), *Natural Change and Human Impact in Madagascar*, p. 364-377. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

DUFFY Rosaleen

2006. «Non-governmental Organisations and Governance States: The Impact of Transnational Environmental Management Networks in Madagascar». *Environmental Politics* 15(5): 731-49.

FEELEY-HARNIK Gillian

1991. *A Green Estate. Restoring Independence in Madagascar*. Washington / London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

GHIMIRE Krishna

1994. «Parks and People: Livelihood Issues in National Parks Management in Thailand and Madagascar». *Development and Change* 25: 195-229.

GRAEBER David

2007. *Lost People. Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar*. Bloomington / Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

HARPER Janice

2002. *Endangered Species: Health, Illness and Death among Madagascar's People of the Forest*. Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press.

HARRISON Graham

2004. *The World Bank and Africa: The Construction of Governance States*. London: Routledge.

HATCHWELL Matthew

2003. «The Founding of the Masoala National Park», in: Alex RUEBEL et al. (Eds), *Masoala - The Eye of the Forest. A New Strategy for Rainforest Conservation in Madagascar*, p. 85-109. Stäfa (Switzerland): Th. Gut Verlag.

KELLER Eva

2005. *The Road to Clarity: Seventh-Day Adventism in Madagascar*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

2008. «The Banana Plant and the Moon: Conservation and the Malagasy Ethos of Life in Masoala, Madagascar». *American Ethnologist* 35(4): 650-64.

KREMEN Claire et al.

1999. «Designing the Masoala National Park in Madagascar Based on Biological and Socioeconomic Data». *Conservation Biology* 13(5): 1055-68.

2008. «Aligning Conservation Priorities Across Taxa in Madagascar with High-Resolution Planning Tools». *Science* 320: 222-26.

KULL Christian A.  
2004. *Isle of Fire. The Political Ecology of Landscape Burning in Madagascar*. Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press.

MERCIER Jean-Roger  
2006. «The Preparation of the National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP): Was it a False Start?» *Madagascar Conservation and Development* 1(1): 50-54.

ORMSBY Alison  
2003. *Perceptions on the Park Periphery: Resident, Staff and Natural Resource Relations at Masoala National Park, Madagascar*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Antioch New England Graduate School.

POLLINI Jacques  
2007. *Slash-and-Burn Cultivation and Deforestation in the Malagasy Rain Forests: Representations and Realities*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Cornell University.

RABESAHALA HORNING Nadia  
2008. «Strong Support for Weak Performance: State and Donors' Mutual Dependence in Madagascar». *African Affairs* 107(428): 405-31.

RUEBEL Alex, HATCHWELL Matthew  
2003. «A Unique Partnership for Conservation», in: Alex RUEBEL et al. (Eds), *Masoala – The Eye of the Forest. A New Strategy for Rainforest Conservation in Madagascar*, p. 9-25. Stäfa (Switzerland): Th. Gut Verlag.

WALSH Andrew  
2004. «In the Wake of Things: Speculating in and about Sapphires in Northern Madagascar». *American Anthropologist* 106(2): 225-37.  
2005. «The Obvious Aspects of Ecological Underprivilege in Ankarana, Northern Madagascar». *American Anthropologist* 107(4): 654-65.

WOOLLEY Oliver  
2002. *The Earth Shakers of Madagascar. An Anthropological Study of Authority, Fertility and Creation*. LSE Monographs on Social Anthropology. London / New York: Continuum.

## AUTHOR

Eva Keller has been conducting social anthropological research in northeast Madagascar since 1998. Her first major study concerned the Seventh-day Adventist church in a small town and a nearby village. Her investigation focused on local members' motivation for remaining in this church over the course of many years. The results of this study have been published in Keller 2005. Her current research project, which she began in 2005, concerns global environmentalism and, in particular, representations of «nature» and «nature conservation» both in Madagascar and in Switzerland. Eva Keller received her PhD from the LSE in London in 2002. She has since worked at the Universities of Zurich and Berne and is presently a Research Fellow at the Department of Social Anthropology in Zurich.

Department of Social Anthropology, University of Zurich, Andreasstrasse 15, 8050 Zurich  
e.s.keller@bluewin.ch