

The banana plant and the moon:

Conservation and the Malagasy ethos of life in Masoala, Madagascar

ABSTRACT

For people in rural Madagascar, the growth of one's kin group and the joint processes of movement and anchorage in the land are fundamental aspects of a successful life. In this article, I examine the clash between the Malagasy ethos of growth and the canonical conservationist ethos of static equilibrium. I argue 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. I further suggest that, in the case of people of slave descent, such defeat reverses the historical process of shedding slave status.

[*Madagascar, Masoala, conservation, national parks, concepts of growth, slavery*]

In an article about the nature of Malagasy kinship (and kinship theory, more generally), Rita Astuti introduces readers to Dadilahy, an old man coming to the end of a long life. In Dadilahy's view of kinship, he has contributed to the generation of a great many descendants. This makes him happy and gives him a sense of having led a successful life. In his vision of who his children are, Dadilahy includes not only his own sons and daughters, their children and grandchildren, and so on, but also the descendants of his brothers and sisters as well as of other kin of his generation. It is as if Dadilahy has extended himself outward in the course of his long life, like a conically shaped fishing net expanding from its apex into ever-larger circles of mesh loops. It is as if Dadilahy's many children are the catch in the vast net of kinship that he has produced in his life (Astuti 2000).

The desire to have many descendants—in Dadilahy's inclusive sense—is, I believe, almost universal in rural Madagascar. At the end of a long conversation my research assistant, HARIMALALA Paul Clément, and I had with an old woman and two of her sons during the course of my recent fieldwork, we came to talk about the joy the Malagasy feel when they have produced many descendants. Rounding off the conversation, Paul recounted the following myth: “The Creator asked the Malagasy whether they preferred to die the way a banana plant dies or the way the moon dies. The Malagasy chose the banana plant because when it dies many new banana plants will still grow from its base. But when the moon dies, it leaves no children behind.” The banana tree, although it only lives for a short period of time, produces many new shoots that grow right out of their parent plant, sprouting around it while it is still alive and continuing to grow even after it has died. The moon, in contrast, although it is eternal and never truly dies, does not grow and does not produce new life. “The moon of February is still exactly the same in March, in April and in May; it's still just one single moon,” Paul added. “The moon has no children. Or,” looking at his audience, he ended, “has anyone ever heard of a child of the moon, or of its brother?” It is because a successful life is one that leads to the birth of many descendants who will continue to prosper and to produce new human life

that the Malagasy chose the fate of the banana plant and not the moon's static eternity.

Malagasy people's desire to be like the banana plant, their aspiration to view themselves as if at the apex of an ever-growing net of descendants, is being increasingly challenged because of the creation of numerous Protected Areas in the country, the stated purpose of which is to conserve Madagascar's fauna and flora, especially its forests. The Masoala peninsula on the northeast coast is almost entirely covered by forest, most of which is classified by conservationists as primary forest. As a result of this, in 1997, half the peninsula was declared a national park, to which local people's access is largely prohibited.

In sharp contrast to the Malagasy ethos, which is based on the ideal of the fruitful continuation and growth of human life, the conservationist ethos is founded on the ideal of a perfect, but static, equilibrium among the different species present on the planet. One might call it the "moon ethos." Within this ethos, the growth of human life, termed *overpopulation*, is seen as a critical threat to this equilibrium.

Past and contemporary conservation policy in Madagascar is based on a narrative describing a completely, or almost completely, "forested island 2,000 years ago. Then humans enter and, through slash-and-burn activities, convert the forest into grassland and desert, which in turn leads to soil erosion and the extinction of endemic species. The end of the narrative is a totally deforested and infertile island unless action is taken to halt the unsustainable production systems of the expanding local population" (Klein 2002:192). This narrative, in slightly different versions, has become canonical in the sense that it is generally accepted and widely distributed by governmental and nongovernmental conservation bodies working in Madagascar (Klein 2002:195–196; Kull 2004:11, 56; see also Pollini 2007, esp. pp. 317–322 and ch. 10). In fact, every aspect of this narrative—including the claim that population growth is the core cause of deforestation—is contested and has been challenged by numerous scientists from different disciplines (incl. paleoecology, paleontology, archaeology, geography, and tropical agroforestry).¹ Nonetheless, it continues to inform conservation policy in Madagascar,² and, therefore, is the narrative that the people living on the Masoala peninsula, where the last remaining patches of primary forest are to be rescued from any further destruction, are confronted with, for example, during environmental awareness-raising campaigns by staff working for the Masoala National Park.³

This article, which is based on field research in two villages on the Masoala peninsula,⁴ is a case study of the encounter between the Malagasy ethos and the canonical conservationist ethos. My aim is not to assess who is right or wrong, and my argument does not depend on any such judgment. Rather, I try to show just how fundamentally different these two views are, a fact that is rarely recognized

but that is crucial for understanding the full significance—beyond economic loss or gain—of the establishment of national parks in Madagascar, and probably beyond. My primary aim is to understand what intentionality local farmers in Masoala attribute to the conservationist ethos and practices that have arrived on their doorstep as a result of the creation of the Masoala National Park. I argue that, by making most of the forestland on the peninsula inaccessible, the park has come to be seen by local people as something depriving them of the possibility of continuing their efforts to grow over the generations. The encounter between the Malagasy ethos of life and the, politically, immensely more powerful conservationist ethos, therefore, leaves local people with a sense, as they often say, of having been "defeated" (*resy*) in the purpose of life. I further argue that although this is true for all local people, whatever their specific family history, in the case of people of slave descent such defeat reverses the historical process of shedding that burden. First, however, I consider what exactly the aspiration to "grow" means for people in rural Madagascar.

Moving forward and becoming rooted

Malagasy societies, perhaps more so than many others, are fundamentally dynamic and forward moving, although this, as we shall see, in no way implies a lack of attachment to land. This forward movement, that is, migration to "land where there is space" (*tany malalaka*), is likely to be triggered by the shortage of land resulting from the growth of a kin group, but other factors may also play a role. Once such a move is undertaken, people progressively root themselves in the new land from which they have chosen to make a living for themselves and their descendants during a process of anchorage that takes several generations to mature.

This, however, does not mean that people become detached from the place where they or their ancestors had migrated from; the contrary is, in fact, the case. The anchorage of the living in their "land of the ancestors" continues to be marked and constituted by people taking their dead back to be buried there. The Malagasy concept of the "land of the ancestors," *tanindrazana*, is not comparable to the European notion of a "homeland" with its emphasis on eternal emotional attachment to the static territory of a nation. Rather, *tanindrazana* is the land where one's ancestors are buried. Thus, a place where people live but where they have no ancestral burial ground is, by definition, not their *tanindrazana*, irrespective of how long they might have lived there.

Eventually, however, after perhaps two or three generations, the land in which people have become increasingly rooted over the course of time acquires a quality that makes it possible for people to imagine or envisage it as their "land of the ancestors." What exactly makes a particular home area imaginable as a *tanindrazana* is difficult to say and may

depend on a variety of factors, but the time depth of people's presence is certainly crucial. However, it is not simply the number of years that have elapsed since one's ancestors first arrived in one's present home that affects this issue. Rather, it is, more particularly, the depth of the "roots" that have grown in the land over a long period of time, and especially the success of having produced children who, in turn, have produced more children, that makes a place imaginable as one's "land of the ancestors." At that point, a burial ground is created close to one's present home, which, precisely through this event, becomes one's new tanindrazana, although links to the older tanindrazana may persist for some time.

This dynamic process of migrating to a new place, growing roots there, and eventually making it into tanindrazana by establishing tombs is widely documented for Malagasy societies all across the island and may, indeed, be close to pan-Malagasy (see Bloch 1994a; Cole 2001:155; Deschamps 1959; Evers 2002; Feeley-Harnik 1991:ch. 1; Keller 2005:31–36; Thomas 1997; Woolley 2002:11–35). The process of creating tanindrazana may involve, as it does in Masoala (but also elsewhere; see Bloch 1994a:206–215; Graeber 2007:107, 109), the transfer of ancestral bones from the existing tanindrazana to the one to be newly created. In such cases, the reason for "moving house" is explained to the ancestors during the ritual of transferring their mortal remains to the new location (people might say to them, e.g., "We are taking you to a new home, so that we can all be together and because it has become too difficult for us to care for you properly if you are so far away") and the ancestors' blessing for this move is sought.

Thus, through a long process of moving forward to and becoming rooted in new land, Malagasy people progressively turn neutral soil into "land of the ancestors." This, however, does not mean that Malagasy kin groups continuously move from one place to another without becoming firmly rooted anywhere. Indeed, the importance, in all Malagasy societies, of having a strong link to one's tanindrazana can hardly be exaggerated; arguably, it is the single most important attachment for people throughout Madagascar. At the same time, the concept of "tanindrazana" is a dynamic one because it is part of an overall process of growth. Thus, migration from one's tanindrazana onto new land and the eventual creation of a tanindrazana in that new place should not be understood as a withdrawal from the older tanindrazana but as forward movement. The new tanindrazana is not perceived as a substitute for the older one (although a tanindrazana from long ago will begin to fade from memory) but, rather, represents the branching out of a kin group. The creation of a new burial ground marks such a success story.⁵ Moreover, the time during which people might live away from their "land of the ancestors" is not a time of rootlessness but a time during which people become more and more anchored in their new land,

which, because of the growing depth of their roots in it, becomes increasingly imaginable as a tanindrazana. The growth of a kin group over the course of generations may be thought of, to use another botanical metaphor, as comparable to the growth of those plants, like the periwinkle or couch grass, that send out creeping runners over the soil; the runners become rooted in new places while, for a long time, still remaining attached to their parent plant.⁶ Indeed, both the banana plant and couch grass are used in certain rituals in Madagascar as key symbols of growth and fertility (see Bloch 1986).

What I refer to in this article as "the process of growth" is a fundamental concept for people living in rural Malagasy societies. However, they hardly ever explicitly express it as such, perhaps precisely because it is so fundamental. "Growth" refers to a whole network of aspects, especially to generating many descendants and being able to give them land; to cultivating rice; and to obtaining one's ancestors' blessing, to which the growth of one's kin group testifies.⁷

I suggest that this process be thought of as a process of growth because it is future oriented. When Dadilahy, the old man I introduced at the beginning of this article, looks, with satisfaction and pride, at all his children around him, he not only sees his achievement in the course of his own life, which is approaching its end, but he also envisages the future growth of his kin, growth that he helped to generate and that, once he becomes an ancestor, he will continue to generate through blessing. Thus, people's relationship with their ancestors too is future oriented because it is concerned with showing respect to one's forebears and especially with properly caring for them in the hope that they will bless and make it possible for their descendants to continue to prosper in the future. Without the ancestors, growth and forward movement—that is, literally, "progress"⁸—is not possible. Moreover, in some contexts, the ancestors themselves physically move forward with their kin when a new burial ground is created. In a way, just as the ancestors create future growth through their blessing, the growth of their living kin constitutes the ancestors. "Ancestors emerge in the birth of children" (Feeley-Harnik 1991:52). This is why, as more children are born in a place where a family or kin group has migrated, that place becomes increasingly imaginable as tanindrazana, "land of the ancestors." The birth of children, the interaction with the land, and the communication with one's ancestors all form different aspects of one general process of the continuation and growth of human life.

I refer to this process as the Malagasy ethos of growth (rather than as specific to a particular region or group) because, as numerous ethnographies demonstrate (see above), it is not only widely shared among groups of Malagasy people all across the island but it is also absolutely fundamental to (at least, rural) Malagasy people's outlook on life. Dadilahy could have been an old man anywhere in

Madagascar, and the banana plant–moon myth could have been told anywhere.⁹

If the Malagasy ethos is oriented toward the growth of human life—grow is precisely what the moon does not do—the conservationist ethos is based on an entirely different vision of the future. This vision aspires toward the protection of biodiversity and the conservation of the present state of things (or, possibly, the restoration of an ecological equilibrium that has fallen out of balance) but grants no privilege to the human species over any other species, a vision that results in large stretches of land being closed off as Protected Areas. The Masoala National Park is among the largest of these areas in Madagascar.

The Masoala National Park

Madagascar is seen, by international donors and conservation actors, as a unique part of nature, a part of nature that is, however, being wounded by its human inhabitants. Subsistence farming based on slash-and-burn rice cultivation—a common agricultural practice on the Masoala peninsula—is held especially responsible for the degradation of the country's unique environment, which is characterized by extraordinarily high levels of biodiversity and endemism.¹⁰ Madagascar is seen as a nation on a suicide track and as needing to be rescued through international intervention. Since the mid-1980s, the conservation of the country's ecosystems has become one of the primary goals of the Malagasy government (see Mercier 2006), a prioritization that has led to the creation of numerous Protected Areas and, in 2003, to a promise by the current president of the republic to more than triple their extent to a total of six million hectares by 2008 (Office National pour l'Environnement n.d.; UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2003);¹¹ this date has since been postponed to 2012 (Kremen et al. 2008:224; Pollini 2007:103). The current government's conservation policy has been put in place under pressure from foreign donors, especially the World Bank, the development agencies of various Western governments, and a small number of powerful Western conservation NGOs, including the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS; Duffy 2006; Pollini 2007:89, 410–416). This tremendous influence of Western conservation NGOs on the national politics of a sovereign state is exceptional, even speaking in global terms (Duffy 2006:741).

The Masoala National Park was established in 1997. Within a quickly growing nationwide network of various types of Protected Areas (Conservation International 2006, 2007b), it remains, in 2008, one of the largest of these entities. Extending over a surface area of 2,300 square kilometers, it takes up half the Masoala peninsula. The park is presently comanaged by the Malagasy National Protected Areas Agency (Association Nationale pour la Gestion des

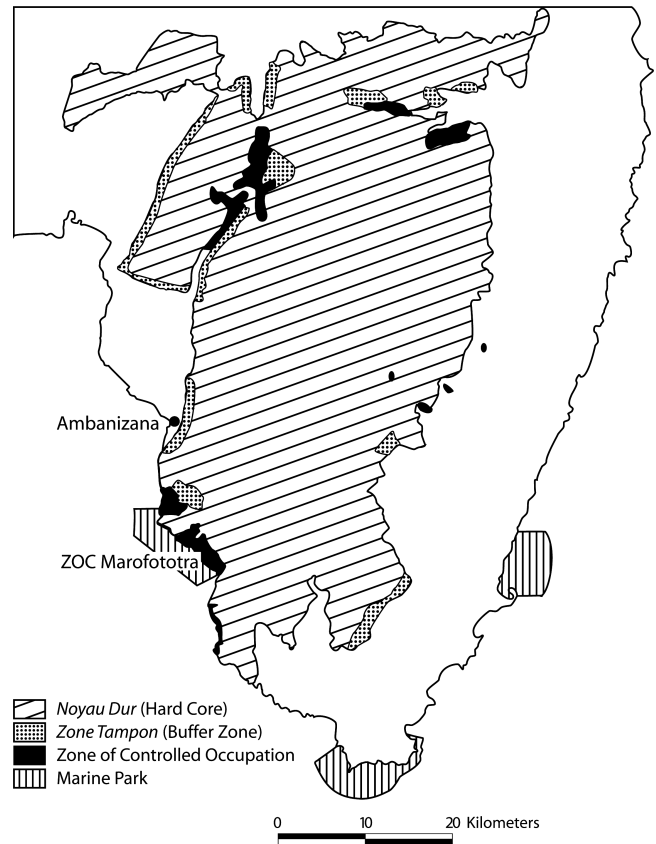


Figure 1. Masoala National Park. Map provided by ANGAP Maroantsetra, modified by E. Keller.

Aires Protégées [ANGAP]) and the WCS—a powerful actor within Malagasy national politics—and is financed by a variety of funding bodies.¹² In June 2007, ten years after its inauguration, the Masoala National Park was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2007).

The park consists of three types of zones (see Figure 1) in which different regulations apply concerning access and the exploitation of natural resources as well as different penalties for violation of these regulations. Almost the entire surface area of the park is designated the Noyau Dur, or Hard Core. Access to the Hard Core is only open to park staff, paying guided tourists, and researchers (also paying), but not to the local population except when authorized by ANGAP. The exploitation of natural resources within the Hard Core is punishable by fines and imprisonment. The recent national legislation pertaining to Protected Areas in Madagascar (the Code de Gestion des Aires Protégées [COAP]) distinguishes between crimes (*crimes*) and offenses (*délits*), depending on the severity of a transgression.¹³ The deliberate felling of trees inside the Hard Core would, for example, count as a crime, whereas accidentally losing control of a fire would be considered an

offense.¹⁴ The stated penalty for a crime is forced labor (*travaux forcés*) for 5–20 years plus an immense fine (the monetary value of two to 400 head of cattle, “cinq millions [5 000 000] à un milliard [1 000 000 000] de FMG”), whereas the penalty for an offense is six months to two years in prison or a fine (a tenth of the amount of fines for crimes) or both.¹⁵ In the political district of Maroantsetra, in which my research sites lie, these draconian measures seem, up to now, at least, not to have been enforced to the degree stated in the law’s text. Nevertheless, the existence of this legislation certainly does not fail to frighten the population, even if the great majority only half knows and half understands what COAP is and means.

The second type of zone within the Masoala National Park is the Buffer Zone (Zone Tampon). Along the park’s edges, discontinuous, comparatively narrow (roughly one- to two-kilometer-wide) strips of land have been designated Buffer Zones inside which the population living adjacent to the park is allowed to make limited use of natural resources, uses not leading to further deforestation.

The third type of zone consists of inhabited enclaves inside the park called “Zones of Controlled Occupation” (Zones d’Occupation Contrôlée [ZOCs]).¹⁶ Although, according to public statements and park staff, the border of the park was drawn, whenever possible, to exclude human settlements, some villages and hamlets fall inside the park boundaries.¹⁷ These places, plus a relatively small area around them, including most of people’s cultivated land, now form ZOCs. The inhabitants of these ZOCs are allowed to stay on there and to continue to cultivate their land. However, all their activities involving the use of natural resources, including subsistence farming, are monitored by park staff and are only allowed within the parameters specified in the relevant regulations. The use of fire as an agricultural technique is categorically prohibited. Remaining forest inside the ZOC may only be exploited in very limited ways—for house building, for example—and its transformation into agricultural land is explicitly ruled out.

In some cases, new villages, also designated ZOCs, have been created by the park authorities to bring together in one location those who formerly lived in separate hamlets inside the forest. Marofototra, one of my research sites, is one such newly created village.

Marofototra

The new village of Marofototra lies within an area that underwent extensive logging activities during the colonial era. Tens of thousands of tons of rosewood, ebony, and other precious woods were cut and then shipped from nearby ports to destinations such as Mauritius and La Réunion (Petit and Jacob 1965:51–53; also see Fremigacci 1998). After the end of French colonial rule in 1960, most of those

who had worked as lumberjacks for the *colons* moved back to their villages of origin, leaving the area almost completely uninhabited. A relatively short time after this, however, beginning in the mid-1970s, people (mostly from nearby villages where agricultural land had become sparse and sometimes the same people who had formerly worked for the colonial logging businesses) started to return to the densely forested area in the environs of today’s village of Marofototra to try to create a livelihood there. According to the traditional understanding of land rights in Masoala, the person who first clears a piece of unclaimed forest becomes its recognized owner. In many cases, single men came first, spending many months by themselves transforming forest into agricultural land for their (future) families. Once established in the area, people cultivated rice, manioc, and other tubers for subsistence, and vanilla to obtain cash. Additional income might occasionally have come from selling a piece of rosewood or ebony. These new settlers lived either in individual households or small hamlets in the forest on the land that they had cleared for themselves, often only a short distance from other families’ residences.

Having arrived in the area a couple of decades earlier, they had only just begun the long process of rooting themselves in the new land when the Masoala National Park arrived on their doorstep. With its establishment in 1997, life took a dramatic turn for these forest dwellers. The area where they lived was included within the park, and they had to leave their hamlets and move to the new village of Marofototra, created in 2001 within the ZOC of the same name. By 2006, almost four hundred people lived in Marofototra, each household allocated a courtyard of exactly the same size: 20 by 30 meters.

Covering an area of about seven by two kilometers—beyond which the Hard Core (the area of the park to which local people have no access) begins—the enclave, or ZOC, of Marofototra includes the new village, the old hamlets (which are now in the process of decay), and most of the people’s cultivated land along with the forest found in between these plots. A document specifying the legislation pertaining to the ZOC of Marofototra was signed in 2002 by various representatives of the relevant political and juridical bodies along with the Masoala National Park authorities as well as representatives of the local community. The latter claim that they had no real voice in the consultation process: They either had to accept this agreement, called a “Dina” or they had to leave the area and give up their land. According to local residents, their wishes had only a minimal impact on the Dina’s final content despite lengthy negotiations between themselves and ANGAP, the Protected Areas Agency. Two park employees (who are not local people but are from elsewhere on the peninsula) are permanently stationed in the village to oversee the implementation of the Dina and to sensitize the population to environmental issues.

The Dina specifies which activities are prohibited inside the ZOC and details the penalties for flouting the regulations. The 12 paragraphs of the Dina concern residence, forestry, agriculture, fishing, hunting, and commercial activities. Of particular importance for local people is the prohibition on new residents settling in the village (with the exception of spouses), the permanent fixing of the ZOC's extent to its present size, and the prohibition on selling material derived from natural resources found within the ZOC (esp. wood) to outsiders. Also significant is the prohibition on selling one's land if one permanently moves away from the ZOC; in such cases, the land in question reverts to the park without any compensation being given. In other words, land on which people had begun to root themselves and that, according to the traditional understanding of land rights, belonged to them, in effect, has become the property of the park, which makes it available for cultivation to farmers as long as they or their direct descendants cultivate it themselves. Moreover, three paragraphs of the Dina foresee the possible permanent eviction of *all* the residents of the village of Marofototra for failure to adhere to the Dina or failure to report to the park authorities individual residents who violate the Dina. To make sure that wrongdoers are reported, a Comité de Surveillance has been installed in Marofototra. This consists of eight residents whose duty is to keep under surveillance, as the name suggests, the observance of the Dina. The Dina is, in short, a legal document that not only is written in a style that is intimidating to Marofototra's inhabitants but that also includes numerous threats and instigates an internal policing system among the villagers themselves.

From the point of view of biodiversity conservationists, the biggest problem in Masoala is the local practice of slash-and-burn rice cultivation on hillsides, a practice on which the population in this forested area largely depends. In acknowledgment of people's dependence on this agricultural practice, the Dina signed in 2002 allows the authorized and controlled practice of a limited amount of slash-and-burn rice cultivation inside the ZOC of Marofototra. However, in the case of a legal conflict between the Dina, which is a local law, on the one hand, and COAP, the national legislation pertaining to all Protected Areas in Madagascar, on the other hand, the latter overrules the former. This has meant that, beginning with the agricultural season of 2006–07, farmers in Marofototra have not received the necessary authorization to cultivate rice on hillslopes because the national legislation, which came into force in 2005, categorically rules out the use of fire within Protected Areas in Madagascar. Nobody in the village has dared to disobey this rule, although no alternative method of rice cultivation is available to them. Within the ZOC of Marofototra, only a small amount of land is suitable for wet rice cultivation (considered unproblematic by conservationists), and only two kin groups own wet rice fields of significant size. As

only few people in the village either have, or are able to buy, enough rice to last them through the year, this situation will inevitably extend—by as much as three or four months for some—the “period of scarcity” (*silôño*) in the village, when people largely have to live off manioc and other tubers to fill their stomachs.

The enclave of Marofototra is surrounded on three sides by the Hard Core of the terrestrial Masoala National Park; on the fourth side, it faces a stretch of the sea that has been designated a marine park. A second Dina pertaining to fishing prohibitions inside this marine park and to penalties in case of rule breaking was signed in 2005. This second Dina specifies permitted and prohibited fishing methods and equipment, as well as the species that may not be taken at all or only during particular times of the year or of a specified minimum size. Within these parameters, the population is allowed to fish for consumption and sale.

Of particular significance for the local population is the prohibition on catching sea cucumbers. Because selling dried sea cucumbers represents, along with the cultivation of vanilla, one of the few possible sources of cash income for Marofototra's inhabitants, it is not uncommon for sea cucumbers to be sold secretly, although engaging in this activity always carries the risk, if one is caught, of a fine and, in the case of repeated offences, imprisonment for several weeks and even months.

Ambanizana

Whereas Marofototra has only existed for a few years, the village of Ambanizana—the second place I conducted research—was founded, according to oral accounts, more than a hundred years ago. Today, Ambanizana is both the administrative center of the municipality of the same name—which includes the ZOC of Marofototra—and, with roughly a thousand inhabitants, the largest locality within it. Ambanizana lies on the periphery of the Masoala National Park; from the village it takes less than two hours on foot to reach the park's boundaries. The people of Ambanizana make a living in a variety of ways, depending on their personal wealth. In contrast to Marofototra, Ambanizana is located at the mouth of a big river and is surrounded by a lot of flat land suitable for wet rice cultivation. Thus, the population primarily relies on the cultivation of rice in the valley and of supplementary crops such as bananas, manioc, pineapple, or sugarcane on the hillsides. Less wealthy families who do not own enough wet rice fields to get by also engage in slash-and-burn rice cultivation, although not necessarily every year. This is possible, in contrast to the situation in Marofototra, because Ambanizana lies outside the Masoala National Park, where a certain amount of slash-and-burn agriculture on secondary vegetation is annually authorized by the responsible authorities. For cash, people in Ambanizana, as elsewhere in the district, cultivate

vanilla and cloves, and some engage in small-scale commercial fishing.

Theoretically, and on the map, there exists a Buffer Zone between the outskirts of Ambanizana and the Hard Core of the Masoala National Park. The Buffer Zone represents a stretch of land roughly ten kilometers long and one kilometer wide that villagers ought to be able to use within the parameters set by the park authorities. In reality, however, for reasons that local park employees were unable to explain to me, this particular Buffer Zone does not exist. What should be a Buffer Zone accessible for sustainable use is, in fact, part of the park's inaccessible Hard Core. Seen from Ambanizana, then, there is only "inside" or "outside" the park, the limit between the two being marked by red paint on trees. The three ANGAP (Protected Areas Agency) employees who are permanently stationed in the village (as in Marofototra and elsewhere, they are never local people) are charged with marking and regularly patrolling this boundary, with reporting infractions inside the park to their superiors, and with other control duties such as keeping an eye on villagers' sea-turtle consumption, which is strictly prohibited under Malagasy law.

Ambanizana lies outside the park, but many hectares of land belonging to people living in Ambanizana have, nevertheless, been included within the park's boundaries. A substantial number of families have, thus, lost a part, or all, of their vanilla, clove, or coffee plantations; other people have lost forestland that they had kept in reserve for their children. Even some distant wet rice fields belonging to people in Ambanizana are now part of the Masoala National Park and as such cannot be cultivated any longer (these are fields that happened to be surrounded by forested land). Compensation for all these losses of good land in the form of cash was promised to the farmers in 2004, but, by 2007, this promise had still not been realized.

Having sketched the situation in which people in Marofototra and Ambanizana presently find themselves, I now proceed with the main argument of this article: that the Masoala National Park is seen by local people as something depriving them of the possibility to move on in their efforts to grow over the generations.

Being defeated

For the people in Ambanizana and Marofototra, it is far from clear who exactly is behind "ny parc" (the park) and what, exactly, names of entities known to be working with the Protected Areas Agency, ANGAP—like Zoo Zurich or WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society)—might stand for. It is not clear to everybody whether such names refer to some kind of organization, to individuals, or to places abroad. What is more than clear in the eyes of the local population, however, are the intentions of those who represent the park (including the Malagasy central government, ANGAP,

WCS, and others): They have come to Masoala to appropriate the peninsula's vast tracts of forested land. For the people in Ambanizana and Marofototra, the shadowy forces behind the creation and expansion of the park are like an approaching enemy: One knows "they" (*zare*) are out there and want to claim all of one's land; one knows "they" are much more powerful than oneself; but one does not know who exactly "they" are, what "their" next move will be, and how fast "they" will approach.

When local people talked about their situation vis-à-vis the Masoala National Park, two notions, linked to one another, were omnipresent: the loss of their *tany fivelômana* and the experience of having been defeated (*resy*). *Tany fivelômana* can be translated in a variety of ways, including "land for subsistence" or "land where people create a livelihood." The sense of what the park is perceived to take away from people in Masoala, however, is best captured by translating *tany fivelômana* as "land that enables life" (see Abinal and Malzac 1993:824).¹⁸ Land referred to as *tany fivelômana* is the agricultural land that people either already cultivate or land that will be available to future generations for creating a livelihood. Thus, a piece of forest lying beyond already cultivated arable land is also thought of as *tany fivelômana*.

Tany fivelômana is "land that enables life" in more than one sense. Being agricultural land, it provides nourishment for people. But also, and equally importantly, *tany fivelômana* is land that enables life in the sense discussed at the beginning of this article: It enables kin groups to grow, to branch out, and to increasingly root themselves in new land. The aspiration of farmers in Ambanizana and Marofototra is not simply to produce as many descendants as possible but also to provide them with land for the future, because agricultural land, and work on it, is, in rural Madagascar, very much part of the overall process of growth that is so essential to the Malagasy understanding of what life is about. *Tany fivelômana*, that is, actual and potential "land that enables life" enables people to grow like the banana plant. And so, if the Masoala National Park takes land away from people, the loss is much greater than the mere loss of economically valuable soil. "We never agreed to it, we have been defeated" [*Zahay tsy nañeky fô, raha resy è!*], one man, talking about the incorporation of much of his land into the Hard Core of the park, complained in a highly representative statement. If leading a successful life is to engage in the process of growth—of people and of their roots in the land—then losing one's *tany fivelômana* is to be defeated in the very purpose of life.

Defeat is particularly strongly felt in the Zone of Controlled Occupation of Marofototra. The complete ban on slash-and-burn cultivation, combined with the shortage of suitable wet rice land and the prohibition of trading in forest and marine products other than fish, is making life in Marofototra increasingly difficult. The permanent limitation of cultivable land at the present boundary of the

enclave, however, threatens not only people's present livelihoods but also their descendants' ability to move on and to create more "land that enables life." "We can't move, not even a little bit" [tsy afaka mietsiketsika izahay na hely], local people would often say. Or—using a particularly forceful metaphor that captures their situation of living inside a territory bounded by the terrestrial and marine parks—they would repeatedly say, "We are just like inside a chicken coop" [añaty rôva zahay], in a tone of voice that expressed acknowledgment of defeat. Such statements refer not only to the ban on physically entering the Hard Core of the park that surrounds people's living space but also to their inability—and especially that of future generations—to move forward and to create new tany fivelômana, to their inability to "pro-gress."

Most of today's residents of the new village of Marofotra came to the area 20 or 30 years ago and spent the strength of their youth making the land productive. They had barely embarked on the long process of turning neutral soil into "land that enables life"—and, eventually, into "land of the ancestors"—when they were abruptly stopped in their endeavor by the arrival of the Masoala National Park, which fixed the point beyond which there is now no access. It is as if they had been stopped by a sign in the middle of their path saying, "Up to here and no further!" Because of the perceived nebulosity of those responsible for the existence of the park, the metaphor of the sign—as opposed to specifying a known actor—is, in fact, not inappropriate. Their inability to move on, to create new tany fivelômana, and, thus, to grow on the land, is the key reason why Marofotra's residents see no long-term future for themselves and their kin in the village. Even if the current population succeeds, barely, in making a living in Marofotra, the tany fivelômana for their children and grandchildren remains closed off beyond the boundary of the enclave.

In Ambanizana, the situation is somewhat different because Ambanizana lies not inside but on the periphery of the park, and cultivable land is available outside its boundaries. However, in Ambanizana too, the park begins just a few kilometers from the village, and it is within sight of people's houses. "Beyond there," people would explain, pointing halfway up the nearby hills, "it's all theirs, it is only what is below that line which is still ours." Although it is considerably more immediate in Marofotra, defeat is also felt in Ambanizana because, there too, the park sets a clear limit to how far people may move on in their aspiration to create tany fivelômana. And it is important to remember that some people have already lost part of their cultivated land, which is presently included within the Hard Core of the park. Whereas, in Marofotra, the process of becoming rooted in the land was stopped almost immediately after it began, in Ambanizana—a village with a history at least 100 years long—the continuation of the process of anchorage is

now threatened. The people of Ambanizana too encounter a sign on their path—put there by an ominous and nebulous coalition of outside forces—that stops them from moving on and from growing.

Those who support and finance the park—among them, foreign donors, scientists, wildlife organizations, and the Malagasy government—justify its existence on two grounds. First, they point to the global importance of the Masoala peninsula for biodiversity conservation, and, second, combining the goal of conservation with that of development, they argue that there will not be any future for local people if they continue to destroy the forest through slash-and-burn cultivation (a process said to be triggered by population growth), if they cut, in other words, the very branch on which they sit. Without forest, no rain; without rain, no rice; without rice, starvation. A nation on a suicide track. The necessity to protect the area's lemurs is explained to people in similar terms, lemurs being at the beginning of this chain of causation (lemurs support the dispersal of trees by eating and excreting seeds). This line of argument is regularly put forward in the context of educating local farmers about the value of the forest, sometimes, as during a "lemur festival" partly organized by Peace Corps volunteers in 2005, culminating in statements such as, "To kill lemurs is to kill one's descendants" [Mamono variky, mamono taranaka].

This conservationist argument, however, makes no sense at all to local farmers and, indeed, is absurd to them because, from their point of view, the effect of the park is exactly the opposite of safeguarding their future. Take the example of Jean.¹⁹ In 1985, at the age of 30, he set up his own household together with his wife Marianne. To the south of Ambanizana, they found forested land that suited their plans. They created wet rice fields and began to cultivate coffee, cloves, and vanilla. Like most other people in their situation, they failed to register their land with the state authorities, seeing no need to do so at the time. "The land didn't belong to anyone! The land was still 'totally dark' at that time!" Jean explained. When the limits of the Masoala National Park were marked on the ground for the first time in 1997, Jean and Marianne's land was not included within them, although it should have been, according to the map. In 2004, however, the park authorities came back to correct this "mistake," which meant that all of Jean and Marianne's land—productive wet rice fields as well as cash-crop plantations—came to lie inside the Hard Core of the park. The couple lost everything that they had created over the course of 20 years. ANGAP promised them compensation of ten million Malagasy francs—roughly equivalent to the value of two years of their cash crops but not their rice—but, today, this has remained an empty promise. By 2006, Jean and Marianne were working as sharecroppers on other people's land, struggling to make ends meet.

It is evident to people like Jean and Marianne that the creation of the Masoala National Park does not safeguard the future of their children by protecting the forest; on the contrary, it threatens their future. Although few residents in Ambanizana have been hit quite as badly as Jean and Marianne, their example is known to everyone in Ambanizana and beyond and contributes toward local people's understanding that the whole point of the park is to appropriate people's tany fivelômana ("land that enables life"). This perception is almost universally shared among the villagers of Ambanizana and Marofototra, with the possible exception of a handful of schoolteachers and park employees who have, partially at least, embraced the environmentalist perspective. In brief, by taking away people's tany fivelômana, the park defeats the local farmers in their attempt to successfully root themselves in the land of the Masoala peninsula and to grow, like the banana plant, over the generations.

Giving up

In Marofototra, where the marine and terrestrial parks surrounding the enclave have a dramatic effect on people's livelihoods, many residents are in the process of giving up the aspiration of making a living as subsistence and cash-crop farmers and of investing their strength and their resources in the long-term future of cultivation. This seemed to me to be the case in at least three respects. First, living with farmers in both Ambanizana and Marofototra, I observed a marked difference between the two villages with regard to people's motivation for doing agricultural work. Whereas, in Ambanizana, my hosts and other families I knew well would work in the pouring rain or the blazing heat for hours on end, if necessary, people in Marofototra seemed to be considerably more inclined to neglect the agricultural work waiting for them if the circumstances were not the most desirable ones. "I can't be bothered today" [kamo zaho niany], people would sometimes say, explaining their failure to go to the fields. Second, I gained the distinct impression that many people in Marofototra have begun to think of themselves as the rightful, but passive, recipients of money or goods that ought to be given to them by those responsible for the park or by others. The reality is, though, that they end up mostly waiting in vain. "There is no work to be done, we just sit around [and wait]" [Ehè, tsisy tabà, mantôtry fô anteaña], they would remark, and, at the same time, they would applaud the few tourists who came to Marofototra and who distributed pens or T-shirts to the children. And, third, Marofototra's residents have begun to turn toward means of income other than those related to farming, although these pursuits are utterly unreliable and provide no security for the future. Some residents expressed their hope that their children might get paid jobs in town or in the tiny local ecotourism industry; others have

begun to engage in small-scale commercial activities, some of them legal, some not. It is, of course, a common feature of Malagasy villages that some people engage in activities other than farming. However, the point here is that, in Marofototra, this happens as a direct result of people losing faith in a future based on cultivation and at the cost of cultivation. Defeated as farmers by having been fenced "inside a chicken coop," the people of Marofototra are increasingly drawn into new areas of the market economy, although at the lowest level.²⁰ In sum, many people in Marofototra seem to be in the process of giving up the perception of themselves as people involved in attending to and creating tany fivelômana, a perception they certainly held when they came to the area in search of land to cultivate. Consider Solo's story.

Solo, who is in his late forties, came to Marofototra as a young man to create a livelihood here with his first wife and their children. He is a first-generation migrant to the region who came from a town to the west of the Masoala peninsula, where his "land of the ancestors" lies and where he will be buried one day. When Solo was a young man, his family's agricultural land had become insufficient to provide for him and his five siblings. Solo, thus, began to work on a ship taking passengers around the Masoala peninsula, a job he held for several years. During his many voyages along the coast, Solo noticed the existence of much unclaimed forestland on the peninsula's western shore. He asked leave of his *patron* and inquired among the appropriate authorities and elders about the possibility of cultivating in Masoala. Having gotten the necessary permissions, he actually began to do so in 1986, setting all his hopes, as did others in the area, on the cultivation of vanilla. Solo at first spent many months by himself, clearing forest to turn it into arable land. "I didn't have my own rice or any other food at that time," he told me. "In order to feed myself, I worked for a few days for other people who were already cultivating in the area, then I lived off what I had earned—rice, manioc, potatoes—until I ran out of food, then I went back to work for food." It was very hard, but Solo continued in his efforts to turn "dark," forested land into tany fivelômana that he would be able to cultivate, even after he suffered serious injury when he was hit by a falling tree.

When I met him and his second wife, 20 years after he initially came to the area, they had a sizable vanilla plantation, pastures (but only one head of cattle), and a small wet rice field; they rented a second field. During good years, the income from the vanilla covered most of their expenses, including the purchase of rice, but, during bad years, when the harvest was either meager or the retail price for vanilla was low, slash-and-burn rice cultivation on a hillside provided an alternative means of feeding the family for about three months. "We were free then" [mbôla libre anteaña], Solo commented, thinking back to their life before they were incorporated into the Zone of Controlled Occupation

of Marofototra. They had been free to do the work they wanted to do and to make their tany fivelômana grow; they were not yet trapped “inside a chicken coop.” Now, with the ban on slash-and-burn cultivation even in areas of secondary vegetation inside the ZOC, instead of buying rice for an average of six months per year, Solo and his wife have to buy for nine. “If we had known what would happen, we would not have come here to create an existence. This year, in 2007, there will be people in Marofototra who won’t know what to eat,” Solo ended his story.

Solo, however, is lucky in one respect. Even when he and his wife were still living in their hamlet in the forest prior to their move to the new village, they had a tiny shop in their house in which they sold daily necessities such as salt and petrol to neighboring settlers. Thanks to this activity, Solo has a patron, a rich trader in another village who supplies him with such goods. These days, he and his wife increasingly rely on this sort of small-scale commerce—at the cost of cultivation—selling rum, cigarettes, petrol, sugar, biscuits, and other things, and, around New Year, they turned their house into a store selling European secondhand clothes that Solo had brought from town. Solo’s main activity, however, for which he travels long distances along the peninsula’s coast, often not returning home for a week or more at a time, is the sale of dried sea cucumbers, which he buys in places outside the marine park, where it is legal to catch them, and then sells to his patron. This is the most lucrative local business. Eventually, after having passed through the hands of various middlemen, the sea cucumbers will end up, it is said, in a Chinese cooking pot somewhere in Madagascar’s cities or beyond.

Solo came to Masoala in search of land to cultivate. He spent all his strength, as he put it, clearing the forest and turning it into tany fivelômana. He intended this land to become the home of his children, who would, perhaps, themselves branch out further and create more “land that enables life.” Eventually, after several generations, perhaps, his tany fivelômana might have become the “land of the ancestors” of his descendants. However, this process of becoming rooted in a new land has been abruptly stopped by the creation of the Masoala National Park. A long-term future in farming now looks increasingly unlikely in Marofototra, so much so that Solo has begun to turn away from farming and toward a kind of small-scale commerce, which makes him totally dependent on his patron as well as on the flows of the local and supralocal market, over which he has no control. If the people of Marofototra are in the process of abandoning their aspiration of becoming rooted in the land through cultivation, then they are being defeated precisely in terms of the process that I refer to as the process of growth.

For the people of Ambanizana and Marofototra, the Masoala peninsula once looked like a place that would provide tany fivelômana for many generations. With the park

appropriating most of the forest, however, that vision has become seriously threatened, and for the inhabitants of Marofototra it has all but disappeared.

I argue that, in rural Malagasy societies, the concept of what constitutes a successful life—and, arguably, of what life is—is fundamentally based on the process of growth. To grow like the banana plant, or to imagine oneself as if at the apex of a conically shaped fishing net, not only means having many descendants whose births testify to the ancestors’ blessing and project ancestry into the future but also means viewing life as a process of turning neutral soil into tany fivelômana (“land that enables life”), of growing ever deeper roots in the land over the course of the generations, and of ultimately creating “land of the ancestors” (tanindrazana). I further argue that, by taking away land from local people, the Masoala National Park threatens this process of growth and that, if people in rural Madagascar are prevented from engaging in this process, they are defeated in the purpose of life as they understand it. Having presented this core argument, I develop an additional issue that is crucial for understanding the full implications of what the loss of land means in the local context of Masoala: the issue of slave descent.

Escaping slave descent

Precolonial Madagascar knew many forms of slavery, which implied significant differences concerning what it actually meant to be a slave (*andevo*). Whereas, in some circumstances, to be a slave meant enduring unimaginable physical and social brutality (Graeber 1997:375–376, 2007:201–202, 226–227), in other contexts slaves were treated almost like junior family members (Bloch 1979:274, 1994a:71). In one specific context (the Sakalava monarchy on Madagascar’s west coast), slaves had a range of important duties within the cycle of royal rituals (Feeley-Harnik 1982). Regardless of the specific circumstances and the extent of hardship involved, however, what made a slave a slave in Madagascar was being deprived of the blessing of one’s ancestors (Bloch 1994b:135; Cole 1998:622; Evers 2002; Feeley-Harnik 1982:37, 1991:57–58; Graeber 1997:374, 2007:226–227). Because people who were enslaved were permanently torn away from their kin and from their tanindrazana (“land of the ancestors”), they could no longer take part in the rituals through which Malagasy people receive the blessing of their ancestors. Not being able to receive ancestral blessing, in turn, means that one stops being kin and, possibly, stops being a full person (Bloch 1994b:135). This is because, in Madagascar, kinship is not simply a matter of being related by birth (e.g., Bloch 1985, 1993; Southall 1986:417–426) but is, to a large degree, something continually (re-)created through the passage of ancestral blessing from dead to living kin and the joint reception by the living of their ancestors’ blessing. If slaves were people who were no longer kin

and perhaps not even true persons because they had “been ripped from their ancestral landscapes, left unanchored to any place” (Graeber 1997:376), then slaves were excluded precisely from the joint processes of movement and anchorage in the land that are so fundamental to Malagasy societies.

Slavery in Madagascar was abolished in the wake of the French conquest more than a century ago. However, its legacy has far from disappeared. Being of slave descent continues to be a burden all over Madagascar, although to significantly different degrees in different parts of the country. To this day, in the highlands, especially, evidence of slave descent often creates an enormous social stigma and, in some contexts, at least, is literally visible in a variety of ways (Evers 2002). Moreover, marriage between descendants of slaves and descendants of free people is strongly tabooed in the Malagasy highlands and heavily sanctioned if it occurs (Bloch 1994a:198–199; Evers 2002:54–71; Freeman 2001:27–29). In contrast, on the east coast, including the Masoala peninsula, slave descent has become invisible, with descendants of slaves engaging in the same daily activities and the same ritual practices as those of free descent (Brown 2004; Cole 2001:73–74; Keller 2005:31–36). This is largely attributable to two factors (cf. Bloch 1980). First, in Masoala, marriages between descendants of slaves and descendants of free people have regularly occurred in the course of the last several generations, and, second, slave descendants have found access to new land in Masoala. It is the latter aspect that I concentrate on here.

If slaves were people who lost their connection to their *tanindrazana* and who were therefore deprived of ancestral blessing, then access to new land was crucial in overcoming slave status once such an endeavor became possible with the end of slavery (cf. Bloch 1994a:210–215; Evers 2002:28–32; Graeber 1997:377, 2007:203). Shedding slave status does, however, require more than manumission; it requires the creation of an ancestry. Only access to land makes such a process possible because it enables ex-slaves or descendants of slaves to restart creating a kin group rooted in, and linked to the ancestors through, the land. Moreover, for people of slave descent to be able to rebuild a kin group rooted in the land, they need the opportunity to engage in that complex and drawn-out process of growth that implies the generation of descendants, the growth of deep roots in the land, the eventual creation of an ancestral burial ground on this land, and the continuation of this process of growth and anchorage through one’s descendants. In other words, people not only need land for the here and now but they also need land that their descendants can continue to turn into *tany fivelômana* (“land that enables life”) and *tanindrazana* (“land of the ancestors”).

This is precisely what has happened on the Masoala peninsula. As a largely uninhabited forest frontier area with vast stretches of unclaimed land, it has allowed many peo-

ple of slave descent to root themselves in new land and to progressively turn it into their “land of the ancestors” over the course of the past several generations. Land available on the Masoala peninsula has, thus, allowed people of slave descent to shed their status as slaves: They are no longer people without a *tanindrazana*, they are no longer people who are deprived of caring for their ancestors and of receiving the latter’s blessing in return, because they are no longer people “left unanchored to any place” (Graeber 1997:376). Among those who share a history of successfully shedding slave descent by having created a new *tanindrazana* for themselves through anchorage in the land on the Masoala peninsula are many people who now live in *Ambanizana* and *Marofototra*. Although it is extremely difficult to establish who is, and who is not, of slave descent, several factors, which I do not have the space to discuss here, make it clear that a substantial percentage of the populations of these two (and other nearby) villages is made up of descendants of slaves from different historical backgrounds whose families have succeeded in rejoining the process of growth, anchorage, and movement by rooting themselves in Masoala. And, as the example of *Marofototra* shows, that process continues.

Reversing the process

The Masoala National Park threatens to reverse these people’s success stories. Although the park puts everyone’s future at risk by appropriating land that is or was to become “land that enables life,” such defeat seems particularly tragic in the case of people of slave descent who have succeeded in, or are in the process of, overcoming that legacy (I should emphasize that this is an analytical comment on a historical process and that, with regard to what people in *Ambanizana* and *Marofototra* say about the park, there is no difference between people of slave descent and others). By setting clear limits on how far people can continue to branch out, the park stops those of slave descent from continuing the process of rebuilding life that their ancestors reembarked on after they became free.

The story of Michel and Ramama is a striking case in point. Michel’s parents were born in Madagascar’s capital in the highlands. Sometime in the 1920s, when Michel was a small child, they came to Masoala, where Michel’s father began to work for a colonial logging company. Both of Michel’s parents are buried in *Ambanizana*. This alone is a clear indication that they were of slave descent: They had no *tanindrazana* (“land of the ancestors”) in the highlands to which their bodies could be taken after their deaths for burial in family tombs. Moreover, Michel’s parents are buried with a group of people from highland Madagascar who are undoubtedly of slave descent, a scenario that would be totally unthinkable if Michel’s parents had not been of slave descent themselves.

When he was grown up, Michel married Ramama. Close to today's village of Marofototra, Michel found work with a French colon, Monsieur Manuel, who had a large logging enterprise in the area until shortly after independence in 1960. While Michel worked as Monsieur Manuel's head mechanic, Ramama ran a shop that Monsieur Manuel had opened for the hundred or so inhabitants of the logging settlement. Partly because of the changes resulting from independence and partly because of a personal family tragedy, Monsieur Manuel went back to France in 1968 and left his entire concession to Michel and Ramama, who had served him so well during so many years. Overnight, they became the owners of a large estate. Misfortune struck soon after that, and Michel died, still relatively young. He too was buried in Ambanizana with the same kin group that had already received his parents as "guests" in its burial ground. Ramama and their many children continued to make a living on the land that Monsieur Manuel had given to them. In 2006, no other family in Marofototra owned even remotely as much land as Ramama—her land included wet rice fields, hillslopes suitable for slash-and-burn cultivation, cash-crop plantations, and as yet uncleared forest—and Ramama was an important local personality, arriving in church every Sunday morning attired in a white dress and hat. With the establishment of the Masoala National Park, however, all of the family's land was included within the Zone of Controlled Occupation of Marofototra. Now it is subject to the national and local regulations pertaining to land inside the park, which, among other things, forbid the clearing of forest. As a result, those parts of Ramama's land that are still forested cannot be turned into tany fivelômana for her children and grandchildren.

Whether Ramama is of slave descent, I do not know. Michel, however, starting off as the child of descendants of slaves, had, through a combination of skill and chance, managed to obtain access to much land on the Masoala peninsula on which his own descendants would be able to grow, land that might eventually have become their tanindrazana. This process has not yet been completed, as Michel's kin group has not yet built its own burial ground in Marofototra. Michel and his parents are still buried in Ambanizana as "guests" in another kin group's burial ground because their roots in their land have not yet grown deep enough to make it imaginable as their tanindrazana. Had the park not come, Michel's descendants, two or three generations after him, might have decided to create a new burial ground on their own land and to bring the ancestral bones of Michel and his parents to their new tanindrazana. But now that they have been defeated in the process of growth, now that they are trapped "inside a chicken coop," increasingly losing hope in a long-term future in the village, this looks unlikely. The process of shedding slave descent, which Michel had begun, has now been interrupted by the Masoala National Park, which has claimed the land

on which Michel's descendants were to create a kin group living on its own "land of the ancestors."

Conclusion

The ability to grow on, and to be rooted in, the land is central to the creation of life in rural Madagascar, not only in the sense of creating a livelihood but also in the sense of creating life through ancestral blessing and through the growth of one's descendants. When the Malagasy chose to die like the banana plant, rather than the moon, they opted for life because, if life is growth, then the moon is not truly alive as it has no children. Since the establishment of the Masoala National Park, however, the people in Ambanizana and Marofototra have continued to be confronted with an ethos in stark contrast to their own, an ethos whose consequences are increasingly being forced on them by a consortium of outsiders immensely more powerful than they are. They are now confronted with an ethos that is fundamentally opposed to the growth of the human population, both in terms of absolute numbers and in terms of how much of the landscape people ought to be allowed to create as their own. What, for the people in Masoala, is growth, and thus life, is, for conservationists, overpopulation. Whereas, for conservationists, to create a future is to conserve the presently existing biodiversity and to work toward an equilibrium among the different species present on the Masoala peninsula, including the human species, for the Malagasy farmers, to create a future is to generate children and grandchildren and to create tany fivelômana for one's descendants so that they will be able to continue the productive process of life. Whereas the moon ethos is understood by those who advocate conservation as guaranteeing the continuation not only of animal and plant but also human life through the protection of the forest, for the people who live in, or on the periphery of, the park, the moon ethos implies exactly the opposite of safeguarding the continuation of life: It leads to policies that "kill" people by taking away from them the sine qua non for the process of growth, that is, land. The encounter between the Malagasy and the conservationist ethos, thus, reveals not only two completely different visions of what the Masoala National Park represents but also two fundamentally different visions of what it is to have a future and, ultimately, two fundamentally different visions of what life is.

Some readers might feel that I have created too extreme a polarity between the banana-plant ethos and the moon ethos. This, however, has precisely been my point. I have tried to demonstrate that the polarity here is, indeed, a stark one because the difference between the conservationist and Malagasy visions of the relationship between land and human beings is not a matter of degree but a matter of kind.

Within the conservationist discourse regarding the Masoala peninsula—as elsewhere in Madagascar—one of

the most central themes is the necessity of educating local farmers about the bleak prospects of their own future if they continue to act as they do at present. Conservationists argue that, if the population continues to grow at the present rate, the forest will soon be completely destroyed and Masoala will become eroded and infertile. To stop this from happening, local farmers must be educated about the destructive long-term consequences of slash-and-burn cultivation, about the value of the forest for their own survival, and, most importantly, about the necessity of having far fewer children. From the conservationists' perspective, one of the core problems lies, in other words, with the Malagasy farmers' lack of ecological wisdom, a problem that conservationists strive to rectify through appropriate education.

The argument that education is the key to saving Masoala suggests that what stands in the way of the Malagasy embracing biodiversity conservation is the absence of knowledge about long-term ecology and that, once this obstacle has been removed, the Malagasy farmers too will want to embrace the moon ethos. However, as I have shown, such a conclusion is highly misleading because it obscures the fact that the difference between the banana-plant ethos and the moon ethos is much more fundamental than is often recognized. The conclusion that environmental education (along with other measures to be taken) can set things "right" glosses over the categorical conflict between the essential premises of the conservationist view and the Malagasy farmers' vision of what the primary purpose of human life is. To tell the Malagasy farmers to preserve the enormous biodiversity on Masoala by stopping their growth on the land—that is, by having fewer children and not creating more "land that enables life" and "land of the ancestors"—is not simply a request to change a certain mode of cultivation. Rather, the conservationist program is an assault on one of the most fundamental values held by people in rural Madagascar: that is, the value of the growth of life through kinship and through one's roots in the land. In many ways, therefore, conservationists ask the Malagasy to give up the very ethos on which their lives are based.

Notes

Acknowledgments. In Madagascar, I thank all the people in Ambanizana, Marofototra, and Maroantsetra who contributed, in one way or another, to this article, especially my research assistant HARIMALALA Paul Clément. In Europe, I thank Maurice Bloch for his invaluable help in developing the argument. I also thank Rita Astuti, Esther Leemann, Claudia Roth, and two anonymous reviewers for *American Ethnologist* for their constructive comments on earlier versions of this article. For linguistic assistance, I am grateful to Corinne Steiner-Raharinirina and Oliver Woolley. Finally, I thank the Swiss National Science Foundation for financing the research project on which this article is based.

1. Research in paleoecology, paleontology, and archaeology has shown that the picture of a once (almost) totally forested island,

most of which has been reduced to barren landscape by human subsistence activities (a theory that goes back to early French colonial botanists; Burney 2005:386), is incorrect and that the extent of anthropogenically induced changes in the landscape since the arrival of humans in Madagascar two millennia ago (as well as the role of humans in the extinction of the endemic megafauna) has been misrepresented and exaggerated (see Burney 1997, 2005; Dewar 1997). Researchers have also criticized the demonization of fire as an agricultural technique (Kull 2004) as well as the claim that the core cause of deforestation in Madagascar is population growth (Fremigacci 1998; Jarosz 1993; Klein 2002; Pollini 2007:242–248, 270, 470–472; Simsik 2002). New approaches in ecology have also departed from equilibrium theory. These criticisms of the canonical narrative do not mean that deforestation is not a problem in Madagascar. What they show, rather, is that this narrative is not only simplistic and in conflict with the available scientific evidence but also ideological.

2. For a representative example of this canonical narrative, see a recent online publication by Conservation International (2007a), one of the most powerful conservation NGOs in Madagascar. See also Harper et al. 2007.

3. See Pollini 2007 for a detailed analysis of the mismatch between representations and realities that lie at the heart of Malagasy conservation policy.

4. This article is based on a total of seven months of fieldwork undertaken in the villages of Ambanizana and Marofototra on the western shore of the Masoala peninsula between 2005 and 2007. 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).

5. Because of the importance of forward movement in Malagasy societies and because land becomes *tanindrazana* through the presence of ancestral remains—which can be moved from one place to another—the Malagasy concept of the "land of the ancestors" is dynamic and fluid. Despite this fluidity, however, the location of one's *tanindrazana* and people's anchorage in it are, especially in ritual contexts, often represented as unchanging and fixed in time (Bloch 1994a, 1996). Thus, out of movement is created an image of permanence.

6. I thank Maurice Bloch for suggesting this metaphor.

7. Although, as recent ethnographies have pointed out (esp. Cole 2001; Graeber 1995), the road to obtaining the ancestors' blessing may not always be smooth but difficult and fraught with constraints imposed by the dead on the living, ancestral blessing remains the goal toward which the living direct their efforts.

8. The quote marks and hyphen point to the Latin origin and the composition of this word; *pro* = *forward*, *-gress* = *to walk*, that is, *progress*, literally moving forward, just what the Malagasy understand "progress" to be.

9. This, of course, does not mean that this fundamental ethos is the only value or aspiration guiding Malagasy people in their lives. Neither does it mean that, at other levels or concerning other matters, there are no significant differences between groups or regions or, indeed, between different actors in different situations.

10. An estimated one percent of the world's biodiversity is found on the Masoala peninsula and an adjacent area (Wildlife Conservation Society 2008).

11. The six-million-hectare figure represents ten percent of the country's surface area and, according to Helen Crowley, director of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Madagascar program, 50 percent of all forests in Madagascar (presentation at Zoo Zurich, October 13, 2007). Between 2002 and 2006, the total size of Protected Areas has risen from 2.9 to 6.3 percent of Madagascar's surface area (Kremen et al. 2008:223).

12. Besides ANGAP and WCS, they include USAID, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Zoo Zurich, and the MacArthur Foundation (current director of the Masoala National Park, personal communication, December 30, 2006).

13. Code de Gestion des Aires Protégées: Law No 2001–05, February 11, 2003, and application decree No. 2005–013, January 11, 2005.

14. The difference was explained in a meeting organized by AN-GAP in 2005 in the town of Maroantsetra, where the headquarters of the Masoala National Park are located. The meeting was attended by leaders of numerous political communities from the Masoala peninsula.

15. Code de Gestion des Aires Protégées, Loi No 2001–05: Articles 44, 45, 61.

16. In Malagasy these zones are called “Faritra ivelomana arahamaso” or “Faritra vaohara-maso.”

17. For a detailed account of how the exact size and location of the Masoala National Park were determined, see Kremen et al. 1999.

18. *Fivelomana*: “L’entretien, la subsistence, le métier qui nourrit, la vie” (Abinal and Malzac 1993:824).

19. This and all other personal names (except the name of my research assistant) are pseudonyms.

20. With regard to another national park in Madagascar (Ranomafana), Paul W. Hanson (1997:ch. 7) argues that one of its main purposes is to make local people adopt a market-oriented view of the forest.

References cited

- Abinal and Malzac
1993[1888] Dictionnaire Malgache–Français. Fianarantsoa, Madagascar: Ambozontany.
- Astuti, Rita
2000 Kindreds and Descent Groups: New Perspectives from Madagascar. In *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*. Janet Carsten, ed. Pp. 90–103. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloch, Maurice
1979 The Social Implications of Freedom for Merina and Zafimaniry Slaves. In *Madagascar in History: Essays from the 1970s*. Raymond K. Kent, ed. Pp. 269–297. Albany, CA: Foundation for Malagasy Studies.
- 1980 Modes of Production and Slavery in Madagascar: Two Case Studies. In *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*. James L. Watson, ed. Pp. 100–134. Oxford: Blackwell.
- 1985 Questions historiques concernant la parenté sur la côte est. *Omaly sy Anio (Hier et Aujourd’hui)* 21–22:49–56.
- 1986 From Blessing to Violence: History and Ideology in the Circumcision Ritual of the Merina of Madagascar. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1993 Zafimaniry Birth and Kinship Theory. *Social Anthropology* 1(1B):119–132.
- 1994a[1971] Placing the Dead: Tombs, Ancestral Villages, and Kinship Organization in Madagascar. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.
- 1994b The Slaves, the King, and Mary in the Slums of Antananarivo. In *Shamanism, History, and the State*. Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey, eds. Pp. 133–145. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- 1996 Internal and External Memory: Different Ways of Being in History. In *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds. Pp. 215–233. London: Routledge.
- Brown, Margaret L.
2004 Reclaiming Lost Ancestors and Acknowledging Slave Descent: Insights from Madagascar. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46(3):616–645.
- Burney, David A.
1997 Theories and Facts Regarding Holocene Environmental Change Before and After Human Colonization. In *Natural Change and Human Impact in Madagascar*. Steven M. Goodman and Bruce P. Patterson, eds. Pp. 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
1998 The Work of Memory in Madagascar. *American Ethnologist* 25(4):610–633.
- 2001 Forget Colonialism? Sacrifice and the Art of Memory in Madagascar. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Conservation International
2006 Madagascar Expands Protected Areas under Visionary Conservation Policy. Electronic document, http://web.conservation.org/xp/news/press_releases/2006/032206.xml, accessed July 27, 2007.
- 2007a Madagascar and the Indian Ocean Islands, Human Impacts. Electronic document, <http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org/xp/Hotspots/madagascar/Pages/impacts.aspx>, accessed April 15, 2008.
- 2007b Madagascar Creates 1 Million Hectares of New Protected Areas. Electronic document, http://web.conservation.org/xp/news/press_releases/2007/043007a.xml, accessed July 25.
- Deschamps, Hubert
1959 Les migrations intérieures à Madagascar. Paris: Éditions Berger-Levrault.
- Dewar, Robert E.
1997 Were People Responsible for the Extinction of Madagascar’s Subfossils, and How Will We Ever Know? In *Natural Change and Human Impact in Madagascar*. Steven M. Goodman and Bruce P. Patterson, eds. Pp. 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):731–749.
- Evers, Sandra
2002 Constructing History, Culture and Inequality: The Betsileo in the Extreme Southern Highlands of Madagascar. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill.
- Feeley-Harnik, Gillian
1982 The King’s Men in Madagascar: Slavery, Citizenship and Sakalava Monarchy. *Africa* 52(2):31–50.
- 1991 A Green Estate: Restoring Independence in Madagascar. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Freeman, Luke E.
2001 Knowledge, Education and Social Differentiation amongst the Betsileo of Fisakana, Highland Madagascar. Ph.D. thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of London.
- Fremigacci, Jean
1998 La forêt de Madagascar en situation coloniale: Une économie de la délinquance (1900–1940). In *Plantes et paysages d’Afrique: Une histoire à explorer*. Monique Chastenet, ed. Pp. 411–439. Paris: Karthala, Centre de Recherches Africaines.
- Graeber, David
1995 Dancing with Corpses Reconsidered: An Interpretation of

- Famadihana* (in Arivonimamo, Madagascar). *American Ethnologist* 22(2):258–278.
- 1997 Painful Memories. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27(4):374–400.
- 2007 *Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hanson, Paul W.
1997 The Politics of Need Interpretation in Madagascar's Ranomafana National Park. Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Program in Folklore and Folklife, University of Pennsylvania.
- Harper, Grady J., Marc K. Steininger, Compton J. Tucker, Daniel Juhn, and Frank Hawkins
2007 Fifty Years of Deforestation and Forest Fragmentation in Madagascar. *Environmental Conservation* 34(4):325–333.
- Jarosz, Lucy
1993 Defining and Explaining Tropical Deforestation: Shifting Cultivation and Population Growth in Colonial Madagascar (1896–1940). *Economic Geography* 69:366–379.
- Keller, Eva
2005 *The Road to Clarity: Seventh-Day Adventism in Madagascar*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Klein, Jorgen
2002 Deforestation in the Madagascar Highlands—Established “Truth” and Scientific Uncertainty. *GeoJournal* 56:191–199.
- Kremen, C., A. Cameron, A. Moilanen, S. J. Phillips, C. D. Thomas, H. Beentje, J. Dransfield, B. L. Fisher, F. Glaw, T. C. Good, G. J. Harper, R. J. Hijmans, D. C. Lees, E. Louis Jr., R. A. Nussbaum, C. J. Raxworthy, A. Razafimpahanana, G. E. Schatz, M. Vences, D. R. Vieites, P. C. Wright, and M. L. Zjhra
2008 Aligning Conservation Priorities across Taxa in Madagascar with High-Resolution Planning Tools. *Science* 320(5873):222–226.
- Kremen, Claire, Vincent Razafimahatratra, R. Philip Guillery, Jocelyn Rakotomalala, Andrew Weiss, and Jean-Solo Ratsisompatriarivo
1999 Designing the Masoala National Park in Madagascar Based on Biological and Socioeconomic Data. *Conservation Biology* 13(5):1055–1068.
- Kull, Christian A.
2004 *Isle of Fire: The Political Ecology of Landscape Burning in Madagascar*. Chicago: 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.
- Office National pour l'Environnement
N.d. *Vision Durban vers le système d'aires protégées de Madagascar*, Electronic document, http://www.pnae.mg/chm-cbd/implementation/doc/sapm/les_ap_mcar_durban_sapm.pdf, accessed December 1, 2007.
- Petit, Michel, and Guy Jacob
1965 Un essai de colonisation dans la baie d'Antongil (1895–vers 1926). *Annales de l'Université de Madagascar* 3:33–56.
- Pollini, Jacques
2007 *Slash-and-Burn Cultivation and Deforestation in the Malagasy Rain Forests: Representations and Realities*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University. Electronic document, <http://www.people.cornell.edu/pages/jp267/>, accessed December 3.
- Simsik, Michael J.
2002 The Political Ecology of Biodiversity Conservation on the Malagasy Highlands. *GeoJournal* 58:233–242.
- Southall, Aidan
1986 Common Themes in Malagasy Culture. In *Madagascar: Society and History*. Conrad Phillip Kottak, Jean-Aime Rakotoarisoa, Aidan Southall, and Pierre Vérin, eds. Pp. 411–426. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Thomas, Philip
1997 The Water That Blesses, the River That Flows: Place and the Ritual Imagination among the Temanambondro of Southeast Madagascar. In *The Poetic Power of Place: Comparative Perspectives on Austronesian Ideas of Locality*. James J. Fox, ed. Pp. 22–41. Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University.
- UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
2003 *Tripling Environmental Protection Plan for Madagascar*, http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=14248&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html, accessed August 20, 2005.
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre
2007 *Rainforests of the Atsinanana*. Electronic document, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1257>, accessed July 4.
- Wildlife Conservation Society
2008 *New Protected Areas Keep Madagascar's Conservation on Track*. Electronic document, <http://www.wcs.org/353624/madagascarsnewprotectedarea>, accessed April 15.
- Woolley, Oliver
2002 *The Earth Shakers of Madagascar: An Anthropological Study of Authority, Fertility and Creation*. London: Continuum.

accepted March 20, 2008
final version submitted April 15, 2008

Eva Keller
Department of Social Anthropology
University of Zurich
Zurich, Switzerland
e.s.keller@bluewin.ch