

INTERVIEW MADAGASCAR CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

Social science and conservation in Madagascar

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Can you start by telling us something about your experience and research / work in Madagascar, and how you perceive the role of social science in conservation on the island?

Social science research in Madagascar is like that anywhere on this planet. It involves scholars asking questions about society in all its complexity, and through some structured mode of rational enquiry (be it theoretical, quantitative, experiential, descriptive, or other). Scholars from within and outside Madagascar have over the past century contributed to a solid body of research investigating Malagasy society, including its interactions with the plants, animals, soils, and waters around it. Since the late 1980s, the environment, and in particular nature conservation, have been an important (at times even dominant) focus for foreign-funded projects and institutions. Unsurprisingly, as a result, a sizeable portion of recent social science research has focused on protected areas, forests, and their peripheries. Sometimes this reflects the agendas of conservation institutions sponsoring research in the communities with which they interact; sometimes it is a marriage of convenience in which a researcher gains access to logistical support (four-wheel drive transport, housing, contacts); sometimes it is because a social science researcher wants to address the 'biggest show in town'.

My own work on Madagascar (on land use change, fire, parks, and introduced trees) has not been affiliated with conservation organizations, though I frequently interacted with particular institutions or individuals as the opportunity arose. In particular, my stint as a 'programme assistant' at WWF International's headquarters in 1992 heavily influenced what I saw and how I interpreted it on my first visit to the island (as a backpacking tourist) that year. In later years, I benefitted from valuable, yet informal, logistical support from WWF in visits to Andapa and Andringitra. It is no accident that my later institutional affiliation at the University of Antananarivo has been through ESSA-Forêts (*Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Agronomiques, Département des Eaux et Forêts*), as opposed to the *Laboratoire de Géographie*, despite being a geographer, for the former appeared more active, more connected, more experienced in hosting foreign researchers, largely from its involvement in various forestry and environment initiatives.

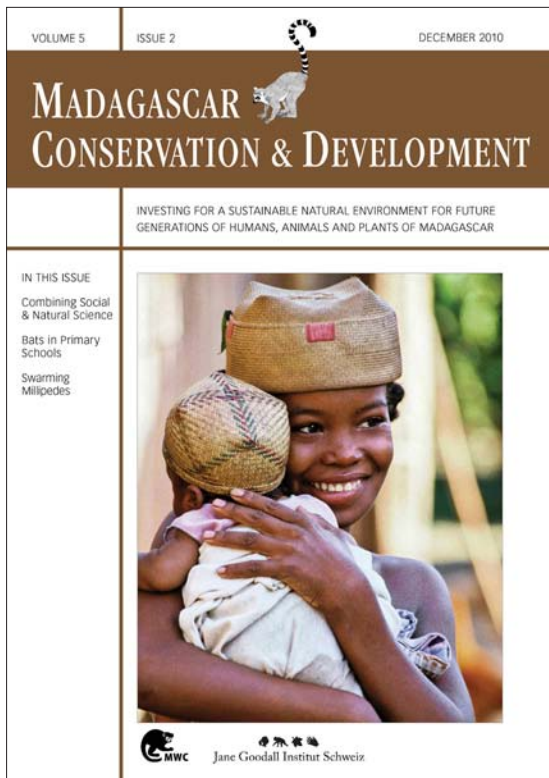
I don't perceive there to be a systemic problem with the role of social science in conservation on the island, though there are of course instances of conflict or misunderstanding. The more critical problem as I see it is one of political economy, between the conservation lobby and local people (and one shouldn't necessarily conflate natural scientists with the former and social scientists with the latter, nor paint any of these groups too starkly). In general, however, the conservationists have money, hence power; the locals have their axes and spades, but little voice. If locals had secure control of their lands within a robust political system, imagine how different negotiations over conservation restrictions would be.

In your opinion how could the social science research carried out in Madagascar be better adapted to, and used more effectively for, informing conservation policies?

It must be recognized that there are a wide diversity of social science research approaches and agendas, and that many of these have engaged with the topic of conservation globally for at least two decades (see for example, reviews of the fields of 'political ecology' or 'common-property theory' and others in Robbins et al. 2010). Some work will be specific and adaptable to field practitioners; other work will be more conceptual or critical, and both have their role to play. Given that many social scientists come to research topics related to conservation with what could be termed 'red and green' views, or ideological commitments to both social justice and environmental conservation, I wouldn't necessarily seek to change how social science research is carried out in a top-down way, but seek to increase spaces for interaction between social scientists, natural scientists, and conservation practitioners (see last question).

Is socially equitable conservation a myth? How could it be achieved in Madagascar?

Socially equitable conservation is a great slogan, but also a myth. However it is true that some forms of conservation may be more socially equitable, or less unjust, than others. Most actions to manage natural resources, whether in a single crop field or across a continent, create both winners and losers at different temporal and spatial scales. Such actions include, for example, the legislation of a fire ban, the building of a dam, the cultivation of a new crop, the creation of a protected area, or the designation of fishing rights. Proponents of change dress actions up as 'for the common good', or 'for future generations',



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or as morally 'the right thing to do', but it is unusual that someone's interests are not stepped upon. This is where a society, through legitimate political processes, should make a decision. This happens all the time – the Parliament of Victoria (home to my university), debated at length in 2005 the decision to restrict cattle grazing in alpine grasslands; or in several indigenous villages in Fiji (where I currently live) the chiefs, after deliberations with their constituencies, put in place marine reserves in their fishing grounds in the past decade. The problem with conservation in Madagascar is that local communities have, in general, not had much voice. This reflects the weak political structures in this post-colonial, frequently unstable polity, the stark divides between town and country, and the lack of bottom-up social activism (compare, for example, Latin America or parts of south and southeast Asia). But it also reflects the strong position of conservation actors, shaped by the country's poverty, its status as a biodiversity hotspot, and the funding constraints of donors like USAID (United States Agency for International Development) (Corson 2010) or AFD (*Agence Française de Développement*). The result is conservation decisions that are rarely fully legitimate to the people most affected by them. As Freudenberger's (2010) review of 25 years of USAID interventions suggests, governance is crucial.

How do you think the contrasting views on the ethics, concepts and impacts of conservation in Madagascar can be reconciled? Who should be doing what?

One cannot expect people who hold different worldviews to change; the world would be poorer without its diversity of views and ideas. However, there are ways to open up space for more constructive dialogue, to avoid the trading of insults across a wide *lavaka* gully. If studies of conflict resolution are anything to go by, compromise and positive interactions (if not agreement) come largely through proximity and engagement. The more social scientists that have taken a class in biology, and vice-versa, the better. The more research teams that assemble truly multidisciplinary groups of scientists the better – helping each other in fieldwork, sharing stories in the evenings, forging reports together. The more integrative meetings, goal-setting workshops, and so on, the better. And all of this should be rooted in a specific geographic context, a place, a community in which people engage and hold some responsibility for their words and actions. And finally, a stronger civil society and governance structure would hold both academic 'sides', as well as conservation actors, better to account in delivering a more socially just and environmentally sustainable future.

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ALAIN BERTRAND, Edenia Consult Tanja, France

Pouvez-vous commencer par nous dire quelque chose sur votre expérience et la recherche / le travail que vous effectuez à Madagascar et comment vous voyez les sciences humaines et sociales dans la protection de la nature à Madagascar ?

J'ai été impliqué directement de 1994 à 1998 dans le processus collectif d'émergence et de mise en place institutionnelle de la gestion communautaire locale des ressources renouvelables à travers la loi 96-025 dite loi GELOSE (i.e. gestion locale sécurisée). Dès cette époque avec divers scientifiques et universitaires malgaches (par exemple feu Mamy Razafindrabe, sociologue) nous avons insisté sur la nécessaire prise en compte de la multiplicité et de la diversité des situations locales. C'est pourquoi la loi GELOSE est simplement une loi-cadre fixant un minimum de règles et de procédures avec une grande liberté d'adaptation selon les ressources concernées et les situations locales. Pour atteindre une gestion locale durable des ressources il faut faire du « sur mesure » local, pas du « prêt à porter » à dupliquer à la chaîne et à « enfiler au chausse-pied ».

J'ai quitté Madagascar et pris ma retraite de chercheur Cirad en mi 2008 mais je continue à y intervenir par des missions de consultance et je me tiens au courant de ce qui s'y passe. J'ai eu encore récemment un exemple supplémentaire de l'incroyable diversité des réalités sociologiques et anthropologiques malgaches. Un collègue a « découvert » récemment un groupe ethnique avec une base matriarcale ce qui est véritablement nouveau et exceptionnel à Madagascar. Une raison de plus d'observer d'abord avant d'agir localement.

À votre avis, comment la recherche menée dans les sciences sociales pourrait-elle être mieux adaptée et utilisée plus efficacement pour servir les politiques en matière de protection de la nature ?

Les sciences sociales ont été et restent encore défavorisées et marginalisées dans tout le secteur environnemental à Madagascar. Combien de sociologues, de juristes, d'économistes ont été recrutés dans le cadre du PAE par rapport à tous les scientifiques relevant des sciences biologiques ? Comment dans ces conditions éviter une dérive inéluctable « d'oubli des populations » et de priorité aux ressources naturelles pour elles-mêmes en oubliant les habitants avec toutes les dérives observées de spoliation des populations résidentes ? Combien de cadres de l'administration forestière sont-ils de formation sociologique ou économique ? Il faut inverser cette tendance qui a démontré tous ses effets pervers.

La protection de la nature socialement équitable est-elle un mythe ? Comment pourrait-elle être réalisée à Madagascar ?

Ce qui est d'abord un mythe à Madagascar (mais pas seulement), c'est celui de la « conservation par les aires protégées » autrement et plus exactement dit de la préservation en excluant les populations locales comme cela a été majoritairement mis en œuvre par les différentes étapes du Programme environnemental malgache avec l'aide des grandes ONG internationales de conservation. L'exemple du *Prunus africana* (*Kotofy*) dont tous les sujets adultes ont été dans les années 90 éradiqués avec arrachage des souches pour extraire des écorces un médicament contre le cancer de la prostate, y compris de l'aire protégée de Zahamena pourtant gérée par

Conservation International préfigurait de façon exemplaire la vidange massive actuelle du bois de rose (*Dalbergia* spp.). Il ne faut pas oublier qu'une moyenne de 10 000 tonnes de bois de rose ont été exportées chaque année depuis les années 1990 à partir de la presqu'île Masoala pourtant Parc national et Patrimoine mondial.

Pour savoir si la protection de la nature socialement équitable peut être un jour à Madagascar autre chose qu'un mythe il faut bien analyser la situation actuelle pour pointer les conditions minimales à réunir et les changements à opérer. La situation actuelle peut être schématisée par la suite logique suivante :

- une demande extérieure solvable et insatiable (Chine, etc.) exerçant une pression constante pour se satisfaire ;
- un État structurellement faible (et de plus en ce moment en crise durable) ;
- une administration forestière squelettique avec des forestiers sous-payés (donc particulièrement sensibles à la corruption comme tous les autres fonctionnaires) ; ces agents forestiers conscients des dangers de l'exploitation illicite n'ont qu'un souci « ne rien voir, ne rien entendre, ne rien signer » pour ne pas se retrouver ensuite un jour entre marteau et enclume dans le rôle du lampiste bouc-émissaire de service ;
- à tous les niveaux de pouvoir des arrivistes pressés de profiter au maximum des opportunités ouvertes par la crise qui deviennent les opérateurs mafieux locaux de la demande extérieure ;
- des paysans spoliés, par la création passée des aires protégées, des espaces et des ressources qui assuraient bon an mal an leur survie misérable et qui voient arriver avec allégresse les opérateurs de l'exploitation clandestine qui leur offrent des revenus et d'une certaine manière « la reconquête », même temporaire et incertaine, de leurs espaces naturels perdus ;
- la création des aires protégées délimitées sur la base quasi-exclusive de la richesse des ressources et de la biodiversité constitue pour les opérateurs clandestins une « quasi-prospection » délimitant les zones intéressantes à piller. Concernant les paysans résidant dans les aires protégées, il ne faut pas oublier cette citation d'Abel Parrot (1935) qui écrivait : « Pour qui connaît la manière évasive et elliptique de s'exprimer des malgaches, cela voulait dire : les forêts étant devenues propriété du *fanjakana*, nous n'avons pas à nous occuper de ce qui n'est plus à nous. ... Je pense donc que, dans certains cas, il aurait été bon de tenir compte des droits réels ou supposés des Malgaches sur les rares forêts du centre de l'île. Dans les deux cas que je viens de citer, les villageois tenaient à 'leur forêt', ils en tiraient des ressources appréciables, ils les protégeaient contre les feux de brousse. » Dépossédez les populations résidentes et vous enclenchez le cycle de la dégradation forestière.

Mais l'exploitation forestière légale sur la base des contrats d'exploitation attribués par adjudication (ce qui ne garantit pas à l'État des prix rémunérateurs ni l'absence d'ententes entre les adjudicataires) ne conduit pas non plus à une gestion durable des espaces forestiers et à l'absence de déforestation. En effet supposons un exploitant forestier exemplaire (qui exploite

selon des méthodes à faible impact en respectant scrupuleusement le cahier des charges. Un tel exemple n'existe pas à ma connaissance à Madagascar où les « exploitants forestiers » sont plutôt des acheteurs de bois en bord de piste à des bûcherons analphabètes (donc incapables de lire un plan et de respecter des limites n'existant que sur une carte). Donc cet exploitant forestier exemplaire achève l'exploitation de son permis. Il redonne la gestion et la surveillance de cet espace à l'administration forestière. Celle-ci devra assurer la surveillance continue du permis et veiller à ce qu'aucun paysan ne profite du réseau de pistes pour entrer en forêt et défricher par le *tavy* une parcelle de terrain puis une autre. On voit donc que le système d'exploitation forestière légal mis en place depuis 1997 ne garantit absolument pas la pérennité de la forêt.

On voit ainsi que la gestion durable et la fin de la déforestation à Madagascar passent d'abord par un renforcement considérable de l'État Malgache (ce que seuls les Malgaches peuvent faire, cela prendra du temps), par les progrès de l'état de droit (il y a encore beaucoup à faire y compris du côté des bailleurs et des agences de développement ou ONG de conservation dont certaines s'estiment – en contradiction avec leurs discours extérieurs sur l'état de droit – légitimes à ne pas respecter la réglementation malgache et à imposer leurs propres règles *sui generis*). Cela passe aussi par un renforcement de l'administration forestière (que les bailleurs peuvent appuyer). Lors des études provinciales préliminaires à l'élaboration de la loi GELOSE, les populations avaient demandé une plus grande intervention de l'État. La création des communes puis le début des guichets fonciers communaux ont un petit peu répondu à cette attente, mais de façon encore très insuffisante.

La gestion durable des ressources renouvelables et la sauvegarde des forêts contre la déforestation ne pourront être un objectif crédible sans une remise à plat de la politique forestière malgache dans ses objectifs et ses instruments. Ce n'est pas au niveau de quelques pourcentages du territoire que se gagnera ou se perdra la bataille de la sauvegarde de la biodiversité et des forêts malgache mais au niveau de la dizaine de milliers de communes sur l'ensemble du territoire. Avec l'échec de la création des aires protégées et de l'exclusion des populations spoliées de leurs espaces ancestraux il semble bien que la gestion communautaire locale (application de la loi GELOSE) soit la dernière chance de la conservation de la biodiversité et de la sauvegarde de la forêt. Si l'on peut admettre qu'environ 0,5 à moins de 1% du territoire soient mis en défens (en préservation), il faut que le reste des espaces soient mis en gestion conservatoire durable par des contrats GELOSE. Le projet Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial a montré qu'il est possible de valoriser la biodiversité au niveau des communautés de base tout en conservant en zone protégée environ 25% de la superficie totale des zones forestières concernées. Les contrats GELOSE doivent organiser systématiquement une valorisation des ressources exploitées au profit des communautés de base. Les contrats GELOSE dits 'de conservation' qui organisent l'exclusion et la dépossession des populations sont des « marchés de dupes » vis-à-vis des populations et ne durent que le temps de la présence effective de l'opérateur. Les exemples des actions de conservation et de valorisation durable de la biodiversité à Didy montrent que les succès sont possibles à condition de consentir un accompagnement et un appui de durée suffisante. Mais n'oublions pas que

le Programme environnemental n'a consacré à la gestion locale que seulement 4 % des quelques 300 à 400 millions de dollars qui y ont été engloutis !

Si l'on veut mettre en place une exploitation forestière durable à travers des contrats GELOSE qui ne soit pas systématiquement contournée ou concurrencée par une exploitation forestière clandestine à grande échelle il faut remplir plusieurs conditions. D'une part, il faut impérativement organiser pour le bois d'œuvre à l'image de ce qui a été fait de façon exemplaire pour le charbon de bois dans le Boeny (voir l'ouvrage Arina) un système efficace de contrôle forestier décentralisé qui associe des agents forestiers de l'administration, des agents « forestiers » communaux et / ou intercommunaux et les communautés de base impliquées dans l'exploitation forestière durable du bois d'œuvre. Ce système ne pourra fonctionner que sur la base de prélèvements coordonnés de redevances forestières et de ristournes communales qui assurent la pérennité du financement du système de contrôle et la rémunération des agents qui y seront affectés. Comme cela a été fait à Didy, ce système de contrôle peut utiliser un système de marquage des bois marqués en coupe, exploités et commercialisés qui se retrouve jusqu'au marché au bois d'Andravoahangy à Antananarivo. D'autre part, il faut repenser et restructurer la chaîne technique de l'exploitation forestière du bois d'œuvre pour l'adapter à la gestion et à l'exploitation du bois d'œuvre par les communautés de base dans le cadre de contrats GELOSE. Dans ce cadre, les bûcherons des communautés de base ne pourront (comme cela a été fait à Didy dans la forêt d'Ambohilero) exploiter tous les ans ou tous les deux ans dans leur parcelle de forêt communautaire que quelques arbres correspondant à la « possibilité forestière » (c'est-à-dire l'augmentation naturelle du volume sur pied pendant cette période avec évidemment un coefficient de sécurité). Dans les massifs forestiers importants (comme par exemple la forêt d'Ambohilero) cela suppose qu'il y ait un nombre suffisant de contrats GELOSE et que progressivement se mette en place par des travaux communautaires un réseau de pistes permanentes en forêt pour permettre le débardage des quelques arbres exploités chaque année.

Comment pensez-vous que les points de vue divergents sur l'éthique, les concepts et les impacts de la protection de la nature à Madagascar peuvent être conciliés ? Qui doit faire quoi ?

La concertation bien sûr. Mais encore faut-il que tout le monde joue le jeu correctement. Il faut que certains acteurs (certaines ONG internationales) cessent de faire du lobbying uniquement aux niveaux les plus hauts de l'État pour obtenir des décisions autoritaires comme par exemple le choix des objectifs globaux de la vision de Durban. Les choix doivent résulter d'un processus démocratique organisé de concertation ascendant de la base des communautés vers les communes puis jusqu'au sommet de l'État. À cet égard dans les années 1995 à 1997, le processus d'élaboration de la politique forestière avait été réalisé de façon exemplaire avec l'appui de la coopération suisse.

NADIA RABESAHALA HORNING, Middlebury College, USA

Can you start by telling us something about your experience and research/work in Madagascar, and how you perceive the role of social science in conservation on the island?

I started working on conservation/development issues in 1989 as part of a Masters' degree I was pursuing in the United States. My discipline was international transactions, with a focus on political science. On that research trip I visited the UNESCO Mananara Biosphere Reserve and Andohahela National Park (WWF managed). The next trip took place in 1991-92 when I worked in Andasibe for an international development consulting firm. The task was to train Malagasy researchers in rapid appraisal (RRA) methods. Then, in 1993-94, I led a team of Malagasy researchers for a 15-month long USAID-funded study on local capacities for resource management (my team focused on local governance). We went to Montagne d'Ambre (north), Zahamena (east) and Andohahela (south/southeast). This research contributed to the passing of the GELOSE law (96-025). Finally, in 1998-99, I spent 12 months in the South (Toliara region) conducting research for my doctorate on farmers' compliance with rules regulating access to and conservation of forest resources. I studied five communities adjacent to Zombitse, Vohibasia, Analavelona and Ihera forests.

During those 10 years of frequent interactions with Madagascar's conservation community, it became clear that the forces behind conservation (research and projects) were dominated by the western, English-speaking scientific community largely organized and funded by western donor agencies. The 'social sciences', for their part, were represented by anthropologists and 'socio-economists'. Unlike in the natural sciences, social scientists were both Malagasy and foreign, some of whom interacted on a regular basis. This collaboration between nationals and foreigners was not so evident in the natural sciences. Since the end of the 1990s, the number of social scientists coming from Europe and the United States seems to have proliferated, while the Malagasy social science community has shrunk.

In summary, aid and western science have driven conservation efforts in the Island. By comparison, social scientific knowledge has played a lesser, at best supportive, role (to the 'conservation cause').

In your opinion how could the social science research carried out in Madagascar be better adapted to, and used more effectively for, informing conservation policies?

There is plenty of 'local knowledge' in Madagascar, be it in the major cities' universities, research centers, government institutions, or the village communities. Opportunities to tap into this knowledge have been missed due to the (1) failure to recognize or trust this knowledge – largely generated and reported in French and Malagasy; (2) difficulty of obtaining this knowledge, which sometimes requires months or years of painstaking field research with communities that do not think 'like us'; (3) absorption of Malagasy brains and talents into *vazaha* projects, foreign-funded institutions such as ANGAP (*Association Nationale pour la Gestion des Aires Protégées [mcd; now known as Madagascar National Parks]*), ONE (*Office Nationale pour l'Environnement*), etc., national consulting firms where the opportunities for material grati-

fication were greater than elsewhere; and (4) indifference or authoritarian tendencies of leaders in charge. It is important to acknowledge this before considering ways to better adapt and use social science research to inform conservation policies.

I think that the first social science project worth encouraging should ask: Who owns conservation policies in Madagascar? This matters a great deal because a government that does not come up with its own policies in a sovereign manner (i.e., according to local understandings of a country's priorities), will likely feign compliance with outsiders' norms and objectives simply to please or appease those whose interests drive national policies because they have the financial means to do so. Environmental conservation, as conceived and practiced in Madagascar since the mid-1980s, is largely a foreign concept, one that purports to serve the long-term development interests of the Island but inadvertently (or deliberately) hurts them by weakening local capacities in the realm of policy making.

Is socially equitable conservation a myth? How could it be achieved in Madagascar?

Socially equitable conservation is an ideal. While it's true that ideals can turn into ways of life where and when the right policies are in place, the concept is riddled with challenges in the African context. What is social equity in the Malagasy context? Most scholars and practitioners think of it as the process of including rural communities in conservation (whatever form this inclusion might take) so that these communities can 'benefit' from conservation initiatives. There is a fundamental flaw here: in the post-independence period, politics has rarely been about the struggle to achieve the general good. Rather, it has been about elites using political office to advance their interests and, by necessity, the interests of foreigners whose visions of development abound. This has happened mostly at the expense of the majority of the Malagasy. Normal democratic systems tie leaders to their constituents through a social contract. In situations where this does not happen, the notion of social equity and the common good can only be alien, if not threatening, to politicians. Moreover, the fact that conservation has not emerged in an organic or democratic fashion, and is controlled by elites and foreigners, makes socially equitable conservation doubly alien to most Malagasy. This includes Madagascar's decision makers. Consequently, achieving socially equitable conservation is likely to be extraordinarily difficult.

How do you think the contrasting views on the ethics, concepts and impacts of conservation in Madagascar can be reconciled? Who should be doing what?

Conservation or conservation discourse? The Malagasy must own the process of sustainable development. As it is, decision makers lack the incentive to think for themselves, to care about the people who depend on sound conservation and development policies for their livelihoods, and to make productive use of both foreign assistance and local knowledge.

SANDRA J. T. M. EVERS, University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Can you start by telling us something about your experience and research/work in Madagascar, and how you perceive the role of social science in conservation on the island?

Since 1989, I have been working on Madagascar, principally in the Southern Highlands. During fieldwork in 1996, I met a representative of an international conservation NGO in Ambalavao. Upon learning that I was an anthropologist, he responded: "We do not need anthropologists as we have excellent relations with the local population. We have solid contracts with the local kings" Some weeks later, a large part of endemic rain forest in the region was burned down by the villagers as a sign of protest against the activities of the conservation NGO. This was followed by a proposal coming from the NGO for me to work for them as a consultant, as relations with local groups were proving more difficult than first estimated. Later that year I did work with the villagers to find out how they perceived their environment and the conservationist interventions. I discovered that the area which according to the conservationist NGO was inhabited by Bara, was in fact a patchwork of people coming from areas throughout the South. They had a wide range of views, priorities and different tenure relations with the land compared to the few Bara families in the region. They surely did not feel represented by the local 'king'. When I tried to communicate the realities of local social configurations to the NGO staff directing projects in the South, the Malagasy local director said: "And you call yourself a social scientist? Everybody here in Madagascar knows that there are 18 ethnic groups in the island. And the region where you just were, is Bara territory. People are Bara there." He called out for his secretary: "Get me the encyclopaedia". And sure enough, the Madagascar article stated: "18 ethnic groups". At that point my views were clearly held in disregard.

This anecdote highlights the very different perspectives of social scientists and conservation workers in Madagascar. Simply put, social scientists work with the local populations and usually feel very committed to them. Conservationists try to safeguard biodiversity for humankind and in pursuing this goal allot it priority over the interests of local groups, who more often than not are viewed as the principle degraders of the environment. Despite the very different philosophical and epistemological points of departure, I remain strongly committed to seeking dialogue with conservationists, as I believe that in the long term our aims and ambitions might be more compatible than they might appear at first glance.

In your opinion how could the social science research carried out in Madagascar be better adapted to, and used more effectively for, informing conservation policies?

When villagers communicate their discontent by burning down their own environment, clearly nobody benefits. It is a desperate, last resort act. It can be prevented by acknowledging that people living in a specific environment have substantive rights over the fate of their own communities. This means that when conservation activities are contemplated, from their very inception, social scientists could be usefully engaged to work with local groups and map out their varying interests, opinions and aspirations. From there it is possible to lay the basis for a workable relationship. But this would also entail granting equal decisional power

to local groups which would include their right to oppose and even veto certain conservation measures. In other words, conservation NGO's should be willing to accept true partnerships where local voices and views are of equal value to internationally engendered conservationist agendas. I should stress that during my twenty-year research in Madagascar, I have become deeply impressed by how knowledgeable Malagasy are about their environment. They healed wounds that I had, with better medicinal plants than any medication I could import from the world where I came from. They taught me how to navigate the environment with respect, and how to use the fruits of what nature has to offer with moderation and reflection. The idea that is still so prevalent that Malagasy would burn their environment without hesitation to facilitate their cultivation activities is misleading and does not correspond to my own experience. However, political instability and devastating hunger realities, might act negatively upon certain people as well. True appreciation of these challenges that Malagasy face on a daily basis should be part and parcel of social assessments in any conservation targeted area. In short, I hope that we can all agree at some point, that Malagasy have rights as people whose livelihoods and identities are engrained in the land. They have the right to be there and their views are of equal value to visions behind internationally set conservation agendas.

Is socially equitable conservation a myth? How could it be achieved in Madagascar?

If I were to state that socially equitable conservation is a myth, I would preclude the possibility of exchange, dialogue and the creation of points of convergence between social scientists and conservationists. That would be a missed opportunity. After all these years working with Malagasy and analysing the conservation activities in the island, I am no longer so naïve as to think that this can be easily achieved. It demands a true willingness of all parties to consider the point of view of a person coming from a different perspective than your own. I have learned a great deal about how passionate conservationists are and respect their knowledge and commitment. That helps me to assess their points of view rather than to see them as the 'enemy'. I have also been enriched by the years of apprenticeship from the Malagasy about how valuable and crucial their environment is to them. Could it not be so that in the end we all wish for the Malagasy to live meaningful lives in the area where they are rooted while also preserving nature? Reality is however that we are in the luxurious position that we can think of long term futures, while the Malagasy are deprived from this to a large extent as many have daily worries about whether they will be able to find food for their children that day. Precisely by having the awareness that short term and long-term aims are of equal relevance and local voices indeed are just as meaningful as those of other stakeholders, collaboration on a more equal footing should be possible.

How do you think the contrasting views on the ethics, concepts and impacts of conservation in Madagascar can be reconciled? Who should be doing what?

The only way to reconcile contrasting ethical views, concepts and impacts of conservation is through exchange and dialogue. Regularly I notice that both social scientists and scientists working for conservation insufficiently acquaint themselves with other points of view and unfortunately often stereotype the other group. That indeed is a missed opportunity. Maybe we

could start by agreeing to disagree on certain points but keep on investing our energies in dialogue at the same time. I remain committed to that, as I believe this brings us better science and a chance to achieve aims of biodiversity and meaningful livelihoods for Malagasy simultaneously.

BRAM TUCKER, University of Georgia, USA

Can you start by telling us something about your experience and research/work in Madagascar, and how you perceive the role of social science in conservation on the island?

I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork in southwestern Madagascar, between Toliara and Morombe, since 1996, in collaboration with the Université de Toliara and CeDRATOM (*Centre de Recherche et Documentation sur l'Art et les Traditions Orales à Madagascar*). Originally we worked with Mikea people, but more recently, with funding from the National Science Foundation (BCS 0650412), we worked with Mikea and their Vezo and Masikoro neighbors. 'Ethnography' means that we live for long periods of time in small communities and participate in daily life. For a total of nine months I lived the small Mikea camp of Belo in the dense, dry, deciduous Mikea Forest, in what is now the Mikea Forest Protected Area.

It is incredible to me that even just a few miles from the Mikea forest, few people know anything factual about Mikea. In Toliara I have met people who think Mikea have no language. I have heard repeatedly that Mikea are either Vazimba 'tompon-tany taloha' (mythical original inhabitants of Madagascar), that they are pygmies, that they eat raw food, that they sleep in holes in the ground, etc. This is rubbish. Oral historian Prof. Tsiazonera and I collected oral histories from throughout the Mikea Forest. We found that Mikea trace their ancestry to neighboring Masikoro or Vezo groups, and still belong to Masikoro and Vezo clans. They speak the same dialect of Malagasy as do their neighbors. All Mikea have a very long history of mixing hunting and gathering with agriculture and herding; two centuries ago Mikea were probably primarily herders rather than foragers. Our ethnographic observation reveals that Mikea live pretty much like their Masikoro and Vezo neighbors.

The only Mikea 'pygmy' we ever met was an achondroplastic dwarf who boasted to us that he used to perform in fairs, pretending to be a captured original 'Mikea', speaking an unintelligible language of his invention, and rattling the bars like a wild animal! His performance falsely convinced many people that Mikea are a primitive, pygmy race.

Conservation always affects people. Those places that have natural landscapes and high biodiversity are often inhabited by very poor, very rural people. Mikea are Masikoro and Vezo people who have chosen this lifestyle for the freedoms that it affords. Yet Mikea are consistently, and wrongly, portrayed as unevolved primitives. In order for a conservation project to gain local support, and for it to benefit local people rather than harm them, conservation practitioners must know more than just the local rumors and prejudice about the people their plans will affect.

Here is an example. As Madagascar National Parks (MNP) has planned the Mikea Forest Protected Area and a future Mikea Forest National Park, they have drawn a series of maps of the

region onto which to plot the different zones of protection and usage. Their maps accurately display the villages outside of the forest, but they consistently show the interior of the forest as a blank space with only one or two villages. Our maps, drawn over many years of travel in the forest, show around a hundred communities within the 'blank' space of the forest. Although we have shared our maps with MNP, they continue to map the interior as blank. I assume that they think of the interior as blank. This obviously affected their conservation plans; they have underestimated the population that lives in the forest, and their distribution, due mostly to their assumption that the forest is primarily a 'natural' space.

In your opinion how could the social science research carried out in Madagascar be better adapted to, and used more effectively for, informing conservation policies?

The social scientists and the conservation practitioners tend to disseminate knowledge in different venues for different audiences. When I interact with MNP or WWF, they request copies of my 'reports', but as a professor in a U.S. university I primarily write peer-reviewed journal articles focused on advancing theory of interest to other social scientists. The academically-oriented conservation biologists also tend to write for other biologists. We don't collaborate enough.

Is socially equitable conservation a myth? How could it be achieved in Madagascar?

I really do not know. Participatory conservation is very tricky because of the huge power differential between local people and conservation and development organizations. A fokon'olo (townspeople) cannot really choose to reject a multi-million dollar national park plan backed by the World Bank.

How do you think the contrasting views on the ethics, concepts and impacts of conservation in Madagascar can be reconciled? Who should be doing what?

Honestly, it seems to me that in Madagascar at this time, the conservation practitioners have the power and money. They have to decide they want to listen to social scientists.

GENESE M. SODIKOFF, Rutgers University, USA

Can you start by telling us something about your experience and research/work in Madagascar, and how you perceive the role of social science in conservation on the island?

My experience in Madagascar began in 1994, when I carried out Masters thesis research over ten months in the Andasibe-Mantadia Protected Area Complex during the initial phase of its ICDP (Integrated Conservation and Development Projects). I had come on a grant to work with SAF/FJKM (a partner of the project) on developing low-tech tools for monitoring and evaluating the progress of conservation and development among residents of the villages included in project activities. The methods were informed by Participatory Rural Appraisal, a specialty of Clark University's program in International Development and Social Change, where I was working on a Masters degree. However, I was very interested in social forestry and the theoretical approach of political ecology, so I was concentrating my ethnographic research on the tense relationship between Betsimisaraka peasants, who practice

tavy there, and the ICDP representatives, many of whom were local Andasibe men. The heads of the project at the time were two North Americans and their Malagasy counterpart, the project's National Director. The lower-tier workers, the local men, often did not see eye to eye with the management. I spend a lot of time in a village adjacent to the Mantadia park, quite remote from the project headquarters at Andasibe, following the advice of SAF/FJKM representative, who was trying to get me out of his hair, assuming I'd be a high-maintenance *vazaha*. (We did become good friends).

I returned for the summer of 1997 and discovered the low-wage workers of the ICDP at Andasibe had organized a strike and formed a union six months earlier due to their dissatisfaction with the project management, and their perception that the terms of their contract were being violated. My Malagasy research assistant and I had befriended many of the workers and conservation agents of the ICDP during that first stint of fieldwork, so they were forthcoming in explaining the events leading up to the strike. These interviews were eye-opening to me because they make me realize that labor was a central though relatively invisible dimension to conservation and development projects. I decided to pursue this theme when I chose to do doctoral studies in anthropology. I returned to Madagascar briefly in 1999 to select a new research site, then in 2000 I began my dissertation research in the Mananara-Nord Biosphere Reserve examining the roles of low-wage, locally hired ICDP workers and their effect on project outcomes. I spent 14 months there.

As for the role of social science in conservation, it has been essential in exposing the causes of conservation failure and in illuminating the assumptions and blind spots of a largely expatriate-driven initiative, where well-intended people with scant knowledge of the political economic history of Madagascar come for the purpose of reorganizing and re-educating rural social life. Even the well-informed get tied up in the expectations and demands of the bureaucracy of conservation: the grant schedules, report-writing, the political spin required to get contract renewals and more funding. The problems are structural, and they endure.

In your opinion how could the social science research carried out in Madagascar be better adapted to, and used more effectively for, informing conservation policies?

The relationship between social science and environmental institutions in Madagascar, in my view, is that the institutional bureaucracy constrains the way social scientific knowledge is delivered and utilized. If you talk to employees at USAID, Conservation International, or the national park service, you see that many of these people are insightful, well-educated, and committed to improving Malagasy people's lives. They have also expressed a lot of frustration with what is demanded of them by higher-ups. I have also found as a researcher that my findings were only useful to projects if they were drawn up in a specific way: as digestible, quantifiable data, as goals, objectives, and results – in short, in a form that makes it easier for institutions to write up reports that illustrate before/after scenarios. This is understandable, but it is also frustrating. Qualitative data that describe how rural people feel about conservation and development interventions due to a history of land alienation and unequal distribution of resources (including ICDP resources) are

not helpful to institutional actors who want to implement clear-cut strategies and get clear-cut outcomes. Even the question posed above demands this kind of answer, implicitly.

Is socially equitable conservation a myth? How could it be achieved in Madagascar?

I don't have an easy answer, but it seems to me that if biodiversity conservation is truly the goal, and the situation is truly as dire as we think, if this is really a matter of species survival on a planetary scale, than I think why not try a large-scale 'conservation corps' program where rural people are paid wages directly to terrace and fertilize the farmlands, establish tree nurseries, reforest *savoka* [*mcd*; secondary scrub formations], and so on?

How do you think the contrasting views on the ethics, concepts and impacts of conservation in Madagascar can be reconciled? Who should be doing what?

I think that for those of us who know rural Madagascar as outsiders, whether Malagasy or expatriate, we need to take an honest look at the conditions of our life and the lives of the majority of Malagasy people, who are scraping by the best they can. Education matters, of course, as do economic options. But the rate of species and habitat loss in Madagascar, particularly now with the new wave of extractive activity in the national parks, far out-paces what any kind of conciliatory discussion would achieve. I say, amass all intellectual and budgetary resources and try something radically new.

JEFFREY C. KAUFMANN, University of Southern Mississippi, USA

Can you start by telling us something about your experience and research/work in Madagascar, and how you perceive the role of social science in conservation on the island?

In my experience social science, and especially cultural anthropology, are well positioned to participate in conservation efforts in Madagascar. But first of all the 'conservation efforts' need not to be foreign to the people who will have to live with conservation as it impacts their daily lives. Input is needed from the people themselves who have an intrinsic stake in conservation. We can find out the reasons why, for example, Betsimisaraka hill farmers decide to or decide not to harvest illegal rare hardwoods from Masoala, *vis-à-vis* enormous short-term economic benefits and even larger long-term detriments.

There will always be opportunists. But in my experience, most Malagasy dislike the changes they have experienced in their local habitats. They would prefer to see more options open to them, more sustainable ways of living with nature in a harsh economic climate, rather than a few paths to environmental devastation.

In your opinion how could the social science research carried out in Madagascar be better adapted to, and used more effectively for, informing conservation policies?

I advocate collaborative research involving people with numerous experiences and ideologies. Conservation is too complex to be homogenized into a 'one size fits all' mentality. Getting people with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise to work together in conservation, attempts to at least contextualize the complexity inherent in conservation. The greatest error made by the conservation sector in Madagascar, in my opinion, was to

see the problem as one-dimensional; that the blame fell solely on 'uneducated' Malagasy peasants who with a little tutoring and arm twisting would miraculously 'recognize' their mistakes and jump onto the conservation bandwagon.

My work with Jonah Ratsimbazafy has convinced me that by integrating local people into the research design, rather than as *ad hoc* harbingers of 'the need to conserve', bring complexity into the forefront, which they can inform conservation policies. We must stop thinking of policies as quick solutions and get down to the real work of making local solutions work for local communities.

Is socially equitable conservation a myth? How could it be achieved in Madagascar?

There is little equality in today's world. What makes us think that conservation is any different from any other institution? Conservation is about sacrifice – not by those working in the sector for a living and a very good living in many cases – by people affected by it in their day-to-day lives. The sacrifice can be made palatable to Malagasy people – who, by the way, know something about sacrifice, since it is woven throughout their culture – by giving them, the primary stakeholders in conservation, various rights and benefits.

For ways to achieve more socially equitable conservation in Madagascar, I suggest readers take a look at Dr. Ratsimbazafy's work in village conservation. He and some colleagues published a nice chapter that served as the 'last word' to the edited volume *Greening the Great Red Island* [Africa Institute of South Africa, 2008].

How do you think the contrasting views on the ethics, concepts and impacts of conservation in Madagascar can be reconciled? Who should be doing what?

The contrasting views on the ethics, concepts and impacts of conservation in Madagascar need a collaborative methodology to pull out each area of complexity. Frankly, I would prefer to have a philosopher of ethics work on bringing out the ethical issues. Ethnographers are good at sussing out the impacts of conservation on local communities. And theoretically focused anthropologists are well suited for identifying concepts and their meanings in culturally relative contexts.

Of course, there is plenty of work for environmental scientists, natural historians, geographers, and development specialists too. But the first thing to do is involve local people into the planning and implementation of conservation efforts. They must be recognized as our teachers.