Navigating New Frontiers: The Beronono Bara of Madagascar and the emergence of tourism in the Highlands

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2024

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Word Count: 61493 / Pages: 197

Abstract

This thesis examines the complex interaction between indigenous identity, cultural representation and tourism in the Beronono Bara community of the Makay Massif region of Madagascar. Initially motivated by an archaeological interest in the region's ancient cave paintings, the research developed into an anthropological exploration of how the Beronono Bara engage with and navigate the emerging tourism landscape.

The central issue addressed in this study is the common assumption that tourism leads to the erosion or commodification of indigenous cultures. Contrary to this point of view, the Beronono Bara see tourism as an opportunity to assert their cultural autonomy and self-representation. The research explores how the Bara negotiate the tensions between preserving cultural traditions and accepting the economic benefits of tourism while confronting historical marginalisation in Malagasy society.

The research methodology is rooted in participant observation, ethnographic fieldwork and a reflexive examination of the author's position. This reflexive approach highlights the duality of researcher experience and the evolving nature of ethnographic research. The researcher's immersive experiences among the Bara and interviews and observations provided insight into the community's strategies for managing tourism on their own terms. Representational devices, such as thematic boxes, help capture the fluidity and complexity of Bara's experiences, providing a reflexive and nuanced narrative.

The research reveals that the Bara are not only subjects of tourism but actively participate in its production, using it as a tool of cultural preservation and empowerment. The research concludes that Bara's approach to tourism challenges the dominant discourse of cultural commodification, instead emphasising the potential of Indigenous communities to use tourism as a means of self-determination and identity reinforcement. This thesis contributes to the anthropology of tourism demonstrating how marginalised communities can navigate and strengthen the forces of globalisation in ways that align with their cultural values and aspirations.

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Introduction

This dissertation represents a captivating fusion of Archaeology and Anthropology, born from my initial fascination with the magnificent cave paintings of the Makay du Massif and their profound impact on the local people. As I embarked on my fieldtrips to explore their perspectives and interactions with these ancient artworks, I found myself irresistibly drawn into the rich tapestry of their culture.

The Beronono Bara, an extraordinary group dwelling amidst the rugged and untamed landscapes of the Makay du Massif in central southwest Madagascar, became the focal point of my research. Their intricate relationship with their archaeological heritage and role as guides for outsiders, leading them through the awe-inspiring Makay du Massif, captivated me. As I immersed myself in their world, the alluring aura of the present enveloped me, shifting the focus from archaeology to the rich experiences and narratives unfolding in the realm of the Bara.

My connection with the Beronono Bara and the wider Malagasy community greatly influenced my research trajectory. I discovered that tourism held significant importance for the Bara. As an outsider entering their society through the lens of a tourist, I was uniquely positioned to witness the complex interplay between tourism and their way of life. During this transformative phase, the anthropology of tourism revealed itself as the compass guiding my work, providing me with profound insights and inspiration. The writings of anthropologists such as bunte, Graburn, Salazar, Bunten, and Theodossopoulos resonated with increasing relevance as I delved deeper into the Bara's world, ultimately shaping the fabric of my research within the realm of tourism anthropology.

While the Beronono Bara might not explicitly identify themselves as "Indigenous," their experiences mirror those of marginalised peripheral groups navigating the intricate landscape of the local and global tourism market—my dissertation centres on the remarkable encounter between the Bara and the emergence of their tourism aspirations. I delve into their cautious embrace of tourism, exploring how this peripheral indigenous community envisions their future involvement and crafts fresh narratives that redefine their identity. Moreover, I unravel the intricate dynamics between visitors—curious tourists or seasoned explorers—and the evolving tapestry of Bara tourism narratives, weaving together a profound tale of cultural exchange and transformation.

The Bara's remarkable journey unfolds against historical discrimination and social inequity that has marginalised them within Malagasy society. They have endured the label as Madagascar's "wild Other," burdened with stereotypes that have hindered their progress. Yet, amidst these challenges, the emergence of a vibrant tourism narrative crafted by the Beronono Bara holds excellent promise. Travellers worldwide respond with awe and respect to the narratives woven by the Bara, and the

profound interaction between hosts and visitors catalyses the Bara's self-empowerment, enabling them to strengthen their identity and proudly showcase their cultural heritage.

This dissertation chronicles my profound experiences alongside the Beronono Bara, shedding light on their awe-inspiring encounters with tourism. It is a testament to their resilience, enduring spirit, and unwavering determination to reshape their narrative within the realm of tourism. This endeavour fortifies their identity and creates a platform for cultural representation and empowerment.

The Research Process: Original Motivation and Learning from the Unexpected

This research challenges prevailing assumptions about the impact of tourism on local cultures and environments. It contests the notion that tourism inevitably leads to the loss, replacement, or corruption of Indigenous cultures. Instead, it presents a case in which the Beronono Bara embrace tourism as an opportunity—one they aim to manage and sustain within their own terms in the Makay region. The study focuses on how the Bara perceive and engage with Indigenous tourism, offering insight into their agency and decision-making.

The Bara believe that tourism can coexist with their traditions and worldview without compromising them. Rather than viewing it as a threat, they see tourism as a supplementary force—something that enhances, rather than replaces, their cultural practices. This research explores their chosen path, illuminating the ways in which they maintain control over their heritage and territory in the face of external pressures.

While economic benefits are present, Makay tourism is also a matter of power, control, and cultural representation. The Bara risk marginalization from NGOs, tourism agencies, and state institutions. Their geographical dispersion across Madagascar further underscores their subaltern position. Tourism offers them a means to assert authority over the Makay landscape, claim visibility, and engage in self-representation.

This thesis also highlights a form of resistance—one that is non-violent and non-confrontational—against external regulations that overlook or undermine local cosmologies. Through Indigenous tourism, the Beronono Bara express a form of empowerment: they manage a tourism circuit that

aligns with global expectations while remaining grounded in their own cultural values. In doing so, they assert themselves as legitimate custodians of their heritage.

My initial fieldtrips to Madagascar were oriented around archaeological inquiry—specifically, the study of cave paintings in the Makay du Massif. I was fascinated by the possibility of reanimating these faded images and uncovering the lives of those who once inhabited the shelters. The caves held an allure not only because of their remote location but because they promised access to an underexplored cultural archive.

At first, I paid little attention to the daily lives of the communities near the caves. My aim was to conduct stylistic and chronological analyses of the paintings and explore their potential connections to Malagasy symbolic systems—particularly those found in Sikidy, a form of divination still practiced today. My fieldwork led me across Madagascar in search of Ombiassas, diviners and shamans, as I sought to bridge past and present through symbols and cosmologies.

While staying in the Bara country among the Beronono Bara, I began taking ethnographic notes. Initially, these observations were peripheral, incidental to my main archaeological objectives. However, over time, the richness of daily interactions and the socio-cultural context surrounding the paintings began to reshape my research priorities. What started as a study of artifacts transitioned into a study of people.

The boundaries between archaeology and anthropology gradually blurred. I came to appreciate the dynamic interplay between material remains and the living communities that engage with them. Conversations, encounters, and observations revealed layers of meaning that extended well beyond the images on the cave walls.

Upon returning to Paris and reconnecting with the French Archaeological team, I began reviewing my notes—alongside conversations with Malagasy individuals and reflections on how I was perceived as a Vazaha (outsider)—which led to the emergence of a deeper layer of interpretation. My notes included revealing commentary from the Beronono Bara, as well as external perceptions of them from non-Bara Malagasy and foreigners alike. These competing narratives, often laden with prejudice or misunderstanding, prompted a crucial realization: while I had focused on the past, the Beronono Bara were actively shaping their future through tourism.

The cave paintings, once viewed as static historical artifacts, were being reanimated through the tourism circuits managed by the Beronono Bara themselves. They were not passive custodians of a remote heritage but active participants in reinterpreting and sharing that heritage with visitors. This shift transformed my role from archaeologist to anthropologist and expanded the scope of my inquiry.

During subsequent field trips, I engaged more deeply with the Beronono Bara's tourism initiatives. I conducted interviews with tourists, local guides, community leaders, and state officials. I also lived among the Beronono Bara, using participant observation to understand the everyday dynamics of the tourism encounter. This ethnographic immersion allowed me to contrast the official discourse of development and conservation with the lived experiences of those on the ground.

What became apparent was the extent to which the Beronono Bara had woven tourism into the fabric of their daily lives. Far from being a foreign imposition, tourism was appropriated, shaped, and redefined to serve local goals. The community's open embrace of tourism revealed a deeply rooted desire not only for economic sustainability but also for cultural sovereignty.

Three field trips later, my understanding of the region, its people, and their rhythms had transformed. I began to appreciate subtle nuances in time, space, and social interactions. Trust and rapport developed into bonds of mutual respect. The more I understood how I was perceived—as a researcher, outsider, and guest—the better I could approach the question of tourism from the Bara worldview.

This journey—from archaeologist to anthropologist, from outsider to participant—required a methodological shift that mirrored my changing relationship with the field. My evolving itinerary, grounded in deepening ethnographic engagement, reflects not only the demands of my research questions but also the need to be present, adaptable, and accountable to the Beronono Bara. The following section, "In the Company of the Beronono Bara: Ethnographic Encounters and Methodological Reflections," outlines how this methodological orientation developed through lived experience and mutual exchange.

In the Company of the Beronono Bara: Ethnographic Encounters and Methodological Reflections

This research was grounded in long-term, immersive ethnographic fieldwork among the Beronono Bara communities of southwestern Madagascar. My methodological approach emphasized presence, patience, and relational depth, shaped by a slow and iterative process of learning through living, rather than extractive observation.

Over three separate field visits between 2017 and 2019, I employed a multi-sited, mobile ethnography, moving through different nodes of institutional, spiritual, and domestic life — from

government offices in Antananarivo to shamanic consultations in Fianarantsoa, from university archives to sacred cave sites, from dusty roads to the hearths of Bara households.

Key methods included:

Participant observation and lived companionship – I stayed with local families (e.g., Alfred, Mr. Lucien, Apollo's relatives), participating in everyday life: cooking, cattle herding, school visits, storytelling, and ceremonies. These relationships formed the ethical and epistemic backbone of my work.

Informal conversations and oral histories – Rather than relying heavily on structured interviews, much of the data came through long conversations over meals, walks, and shared work. These exchanges were often interwoven with silences, gestures, and culturally encoded practices that required attentiveness and humility.

Collaborative learning and assistance – I travelled and worked closely with my interlocutor Apollo, whose guidance shaped the rhythm and scope of the research. Fieldwork became a form of companionship where knowledge was co-constructed rather than extracted.

Ritual and sensory ethnography – Exposure to Bara ritual, divination practices like Sikidy, and landscape-based forms of knowledge (e.g., cave paintings, cattle routes, sacred rivers) demanded an attentiveness to the non-verbal, symbolic, and spatial dimensions of experience. I recorded impressions in fieldnotes, sketches, soundscapes, and reflective writing.

Institutional navigation and gatekeeping – A significant methodological layer involved building trust and securing permissions via national and regional networks (e.g., University of Antananarivo, Professor Barthélemy, UNESCO, tourist offices). This shaped access and shaped the ethics of my positionality as both insider and outsider.

This methodology was not pre-scripted; rather, it unfolded rhizomatically, shaped by delays, encounters, refusals, and generosity. As I noted earlier in my reflections, learning came as much from misunderstandings and waiting as from planned interviews. The field itself was not a site but a series of relationships — fragile, enduring, and evolving — that ultimately shaped both what I came to know and how I came to know it

Fieldwork Itinerary

MADAGASCAR FIELD SERVICES

FIELD EXPENSES RECEIPT NO. 001

March 2017 to November 2017

ITEMS PURCHASED

1. ANTANANARIVO: NETWORKS & FIRST CONTACTS

(March –May)

- Stayed in Antananarivo, Hotel Jacaranda
- Initial networking with colleagues from the University of Antananarivo
- Visit to Madagascar Archaeological Museum to meet potential collaborators

2. FIANARANTSOA: DIVINATIONS & DIALOGUE

(Late May – Early June)

- Two-week stay with Nicolas' brother
- Conducted interviews with shamans and practitioners of Malagasy divination 'Sikidy'

3. TULEAR: GATEWAYS TO BARA LAND

(Mid June – Mid July)

- Met Professor Barthélemy at University of Tulear
- Granted official fieldwork permissions
- Met Apollo (interlocutor and future assistant)

4. RANOHIRA: SHAMANS & CAVE WHISPERS

(Mid July– Early August)

- Stayed at Chez Alice guesthouse
- Consulted with local shamans
- Researched local knowledge on cave paintings in Bara territory

5. BERONOHA: MAYORAL HOSPITALITY

(Early August– Early September)

- Stayed with Mr. Lucien (former mayor of Beroroha)
- Developed relationships with local community members

6. BERONONO VILLAGE: AN HONOUR AMONG ALFRED

(Early September- October)

- Stayed in guest room at Alfred's home
- Observed and participated in local life

7. RETURN TO ANTANANARIVO

(Early November)

- Returned to capital
- Departure from Madagascar in the middle of January 2018

SUBTOTAL: One unfolding ethnographic initiation

PAYMENT: Curiosity, trust, and a pocketful of red dust

[Printed on the back of a notebook page, folded many times]

[Creased by journeys, marked by memory]

MADAGASCAR FIELD SERVICES

FIELD EXPENSES RECEIPT NO. 002

March 2018 to July 2018

ITEMS PURCHASED

1. ANTANANARIVO – Bureaucracy Encore
(Early March)

- 2-week stay in the capital
- Meetings with the Culture Office and Tourism Board
- Slow dances with government paperwork

2. TULEAR – Permissions and Partnerships
(Mid March)

- Met with Professor Barthélemy
- Collected renewed permissions
- Reunited with Apollo (interlocutor, fixer, future friend)

3. RANOHIRA – Dual Stay
(Mid March)

- 3 nights at Chez Alice
- 3 nights hosted by Apollo's cousin
- Calm before the cattle trails

4. BERONOHA – Intel & Outreach
(Late March - April)

- 2-week stay with Apollo's cousins
- Assisted at the local school
- Collected community insights and introductions

5. BERONONO – Embedded Fieldwork
(April – Mid July)

- Stayed with Apollo's cousin
- Daily immersion in village rhythms
- Notes inked by candlelight, friendships forged over rice

6. RETURN LOOP
(Late July)

- Journeyed back through Tulear (Apollo departs)
- Final stay in Antananarivo at Madagascar Underground
- hostel (expat special)
- Prepared for departure

SUBTOTAL: One committed fieldworker

PAYMENT: Endurance, Kindness & Dusty Shoes

NOTES: All entries final. Rain, kinship, and serendipity not itemized.

MADAGASCAR FIELD SERVICES

FIELD EXPENSES RECEIPT NO. 003

October 2018 to January 2019

ITEMS PURCHASED

1.ANTANANARIVO – Bureaucratic Beginnings
(Early October)

- Meetings with UNESCO officials
- Visits to the Tourism Board
- Reconnecting with University of Antananarivo colleagues

2.TULEAR – Southern Reconnections
(Early October)

- Hostel accommodation
- Permissions from Professor Barthélemy
- Reunion with Apollo

3.RANOHIRA – Familiar Footsteps
(Mid October)

- 4-night stay at Chez Alice
- 5-night stay at Apollo's cousin's home

4.BERONOHA – Thresholds Revisited
(Late October)

- Lodging at Apollo's cousin's house
- Orientation into Bara daily life

5.BERONONO VILLAGE – Final Immersion
(November – Mid January)

- Residence at Apollo's cousin's house
- Long-term community integration and research

6.ANTANANARIVO – Closing Chapter
(Late January)

- Return to the capital
- Final departure from Madagascar

SUBTOTAL: One full circle completed

PAYMENT: Patience, Insight & Return Tickets

COMMENTS: No change given. All moments kept.

Framing the Fieldwork: Understanding the Representational Layers

The first featured box below focuses on the people I examine in this thesis: the Bara. I have deliberately placed this account in a box to highlight how conventional historical narratives often confine people to a static present. While the modern Bara do not live in a box, traditional scholarship has tended to portray them in fixed and timeless terms. By reviewing the conventional literature within a box, I symbolically signal the problem of enclosure itself. Furthermore, writing about communities can unintentionally represent their way of life as unchanging, when in reality, cultures, traditions, and practices are constantly in flux, adapting to the present. This dynamic is well illustrated by Colin Turnbull, who wrote movingly about the "timeless" world of the Mbuti Pygmies in *The Forest People* (1961) and, twenty-two years later, published *The Mbuti Pygmies: Change and Adaptation* (1983), detailing the profound changes that reshaped the Mbuti people's lives.

In this spirit, my ethnography is deliberately composed as a woven tapestry of multiple timelines. Fieldwork from different visits and temporal moments is braided into a single, cohesive narrative. Instead of presenting my fieldwork as a neat chronological progression, I have structured the ethnography around thematic and experiential resonances—showing how certain events, reflections, and discoveries overlap and intertwine over time. The reader is thus invited to move with me across moments, not always in a sequential order but always with meaning. Each text box is positioned intentionally within the main narrative to guide the reader through the internal and external paradigms of contradiction, contemplation, and discovery that I experienced during my fieldwork with the Bara.

The inspiration for writing my ethnography in this manner comes largely from Michael Jackson's *At Home in the World* (1995). Additional inspirations for my writing style are Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* (1993), Neni Panourgia's *Fragments of Death: Fables of Identity* (1996), and Julie Taylor's *Paper Tangos* (1998). Taylor's work, in particular, exemplifies how fragmented, affective storytelling can reflect the embodied, non-linear realities of fieldwork, using performance and narrative rupture to mirror the emotional complexities of ethnographic experience. These works encourage us to see ethnographic writing not as a closed process, but as moments and stories that are continually reconstituted and relived. I believe that in ethnographic writing, we need to retell these stories to represent them as they happen.

My use of "*The Crossing*" as a metaphor seeks to capture this sense of openness and incompleteness. At the same time, the crossing tells the story of my transition from archaeologist to anthropologist. I

find beauty in storytelling when I focus on what was experienced and lived. As Michael Jackson notes, everything can be a story, since everything is the outcome of a process; however, not everything is "sayable" (2002:21). Storytelling, for Michael Jackson, is a "vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events passively but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination" (2002:15).

Throughout the ethnographic sections, starting with "The Crossing," I employ text boxes as representational devices. Each box has its own distinct theme and style of writing—whether analytical, technical, descriptive, or creative—and is placed to explain, complement, interrupt, or enrich the flow of the main narrative. The use of these boxes is intended to enhance the story, rather than to fragment or disrupt it. This approach aligns with Neni Panourgia's concept of "Parerga," which refers to the work behind the work, and echoes Julie Taylor's "Paper Tangos," where the interplay of personal narrative, political history, and bodily gesture creates a textured, non-linear mode of ethnographic understanding. Like Taylor, I seek to allow for gaps, overlaps, and shifts in tone, recognizing that ethnographic understanding often emerges not through linear exposition but through layered, partial revelations.

These text boxes function as a narrative behind the narrative, offering spaces where reflexive honesty, analytical uncertainty, and creative experimentation can emerge. It is through the processes of telling and retelling that the fieldwork experience becomes active, relational, and dynamic.

Another important note for readers: all images reproduced in this thesis have been intentionally pixelated. This decision was made to protect the specific localities within Bara territory, safeguard the anonymity and dignity of the Bara people, and maintain a consistent ethical approach throughout the thesis. Instead of providing voyeuristic or potentially compromising visual documentation, the images offer only partial impressions—much like the ethnographic narrative itself. The pixelation thus serves both an ethical and aesthetic function: it respects the integrity of the fieldwork encounter and visually reflects the fragmentary, interpretive nature of ethnographic representation.

In short, this ethnography invites the reader into a layered, reflexive space: a crossing of timelines, a weaving of stories, and a careful negotiation between revelation and concealment. The text encourages the reader to join me in navigating the fluid boundaries between knowledge and uncertainty, between the visible and the partially veiled, and between the certainty of analysis and the unpredictability of lived experience.

Another feature of the representational devices used throughout is to reconstruct the reality of my experiences—both personal and academic—during fieldwork, which I believe introduces a degree of reflexive honesty. I do not shy away from discussing my mistakes, the trajectories and modes of thought that seemed to lead nowhere, or the moments when I felt lost. For it was precisely those moments of confusion that became moments of discovery—or, as Fernandez (1986) describes them, revelatory moments—that ultimately provided the analytical inspiration for this ethnographic endeavor.

"The Crossing" narrates the story of the Beronono Bara tourism venture, but, equally, it tells the story of my own crossings: of failures, uncertainties, and transformations. By sharing my own journey alongside the narrative of the Beronono Bara and weaving representational devices throughout, I hope to create a form of ethnographic writing that connects more deeply with the reader and reveals more about the people we write about. After all, there are many ways to tell the same story.

Geography Of Madagascar and The Makay Du Massif

Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world stretching approximately 1,600 kilometres from North to South and 570 kilometres East to West (Randrainja and Ellis 2009: 22). The East coast is characterised by rain forests, lowlands leading inland towards steep cliffs and central highlands. The North is principally a high range of volcanic mountains. The west coast contains many protected harbours and broad plains, whereas Central Madagascar features high plateaus covered with stretches of rice paddies, which descend into the more arid regions of the South (Sandra J.T.M. Evers 2002:11). Geologically speaking Madagascar was once part of a super continent 'Gonwanaland' which comprised of South America, Africa, India, Australia, Antarctica. Some 200,000,000 years ago Africa and Madagascar split from the super continent (Mervyn Brown 1978: 1-2). Thus completely divorced from Africa, 80% of its flora and flauna is endemic and indigenous to Madagascar (Randrainja and Ellis 2009: 22).

The Makay is located in the west-central part of the island. It is situated between two regions Atsimo-Andrefana and Menabe about 100km from the west coast of Madagascar. It totals 4000 kilometres squared. It extends for 150 kilometres between the localities of Beroroha in the south to that of Malaimbandy in the north and is less than 40 kilometres in its widest part. The Massif bathes with the river Mangoky, Maharivo, Morondavo and Tsirbihina Rivers.

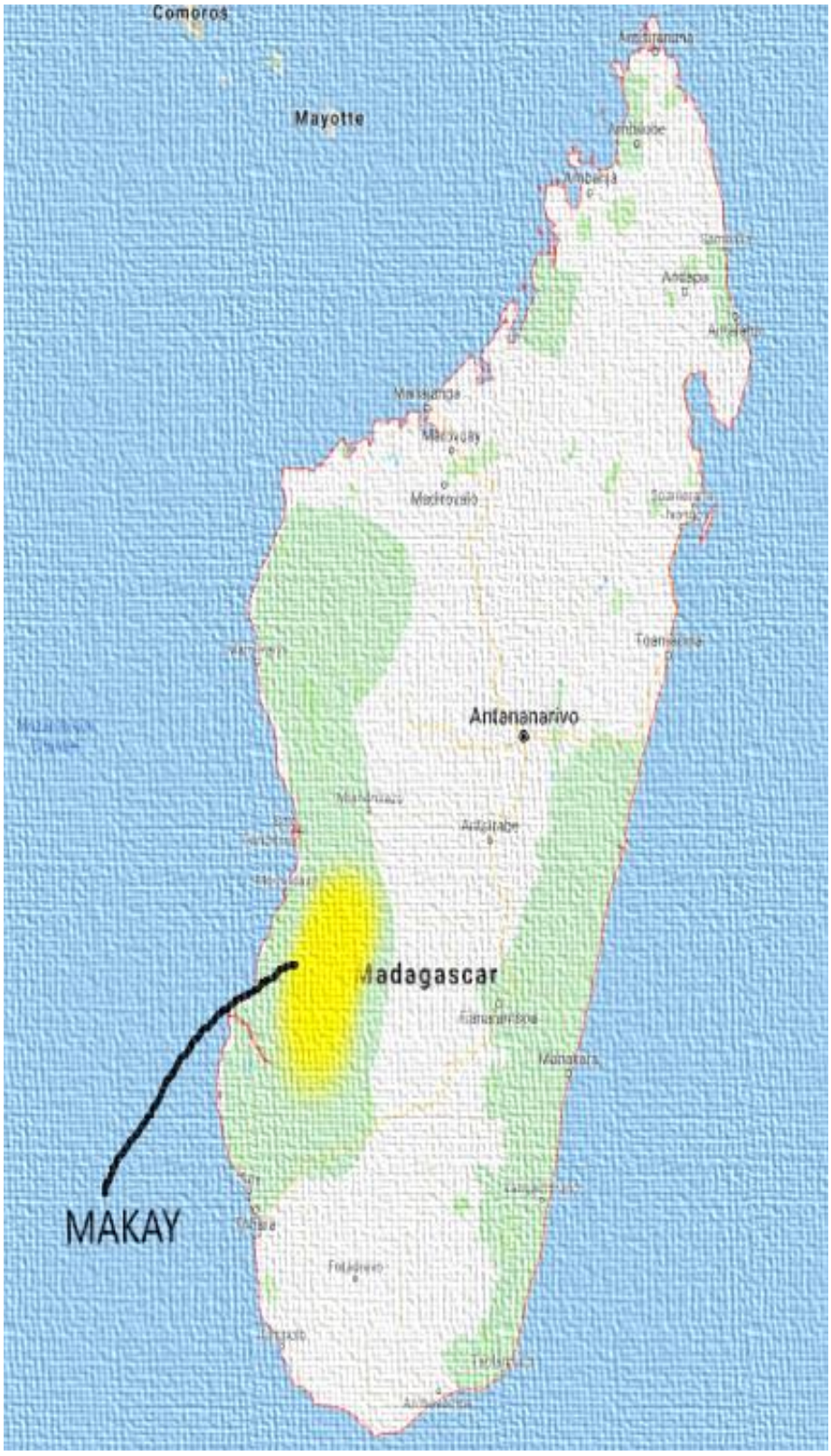
The name Makay comes from two Malagasy words 'Maka' which means "take, take back" and 'Aina' which means "life". Thus 'Makay' is translated as "Resume Life". Likely coined from the time of the first king of Madagascar Adrainampoinimerina whose first motto was "to make the sea the limit of his kingdom" (Nny ranomasina no valamparihiko) (Christiane Rafidinarivo 2009: 85). When on his conquest of the southwest of Madagascar, exhausted, the troops arriving at the edge of a river the commander announced to them that they were going to 'take a little rest' ('Maka ainy kely' became Makaykely). On their way back from the west the men stumbled across a natural barrier; a labyrinth of canyons that they could not cross but found the temperature was lenient, the water was clear and the forest abundant. The commander this time exclaimed "it is here that we will take a rest" (rest = Maka aina pronounced makaina in phonetics)

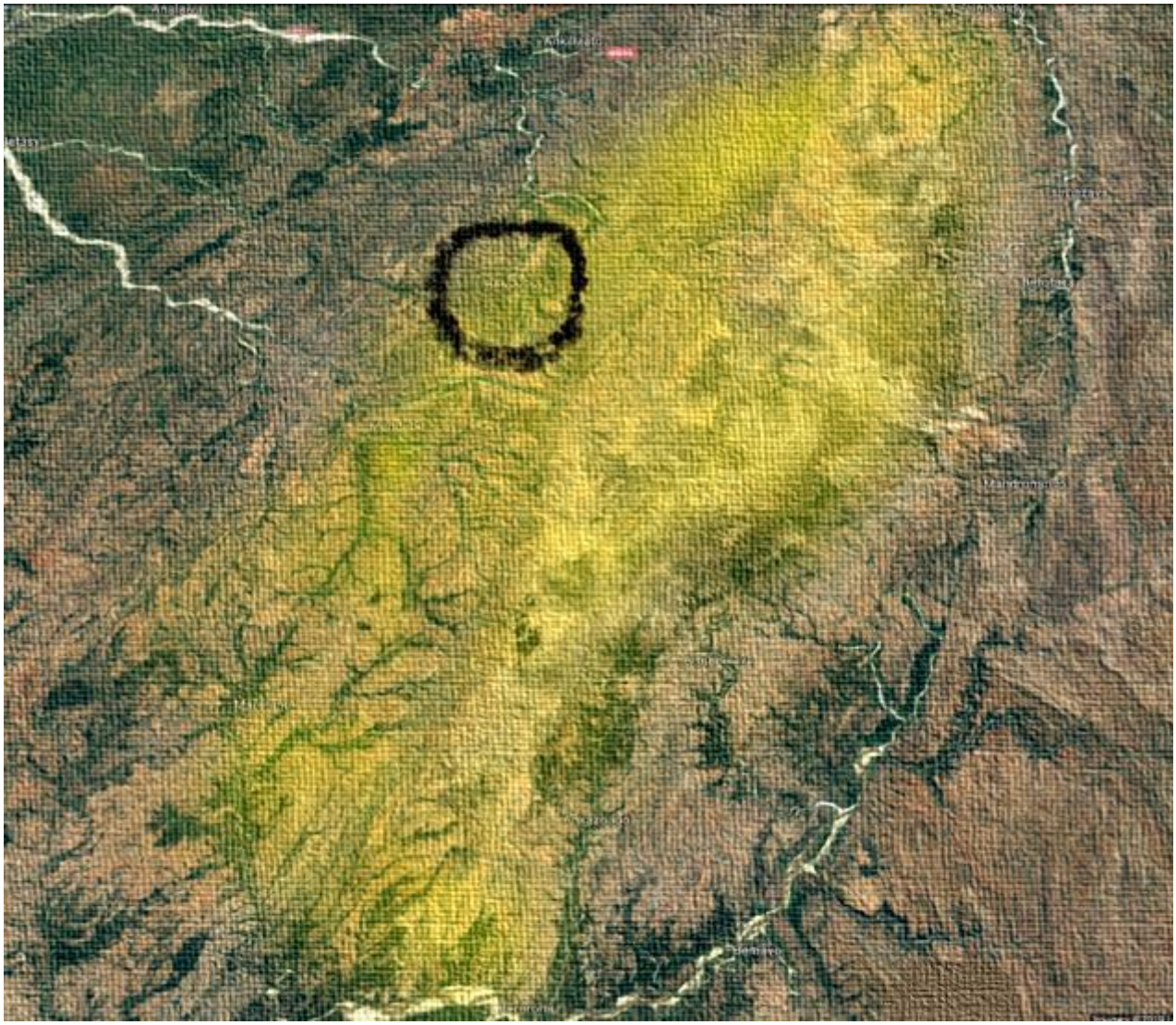
The Makay du Massif geologically belongs to the late Triassic (about 250 million years) but stabilizing by the late Jurassic period (about 200 Million years). It extends north to southwestern Madagascar about 180km north-south direction about 75km from east to west. It reaches altitudes between 800m and 1,200 m north of the river Mangoky. The semi-desert sandstone is interspersed with large - flooded areas hosting deep detrital deposits of grain sand with black traces of magnetite and other heavy minerals. The sandstone beds whitish yellow to orange – red are intercalated beds of marl (argillite) of green and purple colours. In some places, there are large fossil deposits of partly polished wood, remnants of the result of massive floods that ripped old Triassic forests apart. The relief of the massif is intersected by deep gullies which are concentrated at the bottom of rivers white quartz sands appearing during drier seasons. These beds are formed from lavakas (anastomosing near dendritic gullies, major consequences of deforestation) that result in generally open and sometimes closed canyons and river beds. These retain in places forest galleries hidden among the crevices and cavities of the Makay (Erik Gonthier et al. 2010).

Thus, among the patchwork of diverse ecosystems in Madagascar the Makay stands among them a Terra Incognita. Unlike the evergreen forests of Eastern Madagascar, life has taken to these hundred-meter-deep valleys of the Makay and has developed there in complete autarky for millions of years. Filling every possible ecological niche, isolated and preserved from human intervention, these biotopes have allowed animal species and ancestral plants to subdivide down to the point new species appear.

The Sakalava peoples now of the western coast of Madagascar were the first ethnic groups to settle in the Makay during the 19th century before being pushed back by the Merina conquering forces. This left an opportunity for the Bara who are known to be pastoralists and nomads to settle in the area. The Betsileo traditionally farmers came in as traders. The Bara expansion into the Makay continues

until the middle of the twentieth century and by the 1950 / 1960s the villages now on the periphery of the Makay du Massif began to appear.





Text Box 1 - The Bara – As Static Representation

Above anything the Bara prove to be difficult and contradictory when sourcing through the literature. Not many Europeans ventured into Bara country (Kent 1968:389). The few namely Richardson 1877, Cowan 1880, Nielson-Lund 1887, Catat and Maistre 1890 offer the little that is available on the Bara, whilst Alred Grandidier who skirted Ibara in 1868 and again in 1870 has his mentions. London Missionary Society probably ventured into Ibara after the 1850s as implied by R.Baron (1881: 82-4). The few that did were either passing through or spent a short while and thus information about the Bara from centuries past comes from those select few accounts. The majority of Bara history is a work of weaving through the sources and correlating the available information. The following summation will be for some confusing and at times lack correlation in timeline, but it was written as such to corroborate the messy and often times contradictory nature of the Bara history.

First and foremost the Bara territory although at present demarcated by borders and standard cartographic delineations is in reality quite hard to define. As attested by Conrad P. Kottak when he mentions that 'if one wishes to know where Betsileo territory stops and Bara territory begins he will usually have to ask someone' (1971:136). The Betsileo live south east to the Bara but this distinction between the Bara and Betsileo appears to have been created by the Merina when they drew an administrative line between the Betsileo province with its capital in Fianarantsoa, and, the Bara province with its northern capital at Ilhosy.

The Merina who consolidated much of their rule over Madagascar In the late 18th Century to form a unified kingdom are interesting in Bara history. Much of the denominators and interethnic contacts between the peoples of Madagascar can be seen as a result of Merina rule. The creation of the contemporary Malagasy ethnic units is due to the Merina definitions and the French Colonial administration adopted these same ethnic labels. Flacourt (1661) however shows that many of these ethnic labels do not appear on a list of Malagasy societies during his time. Whilst the Bara for the most part subdued Merina incursions they became part of the overall political matrix under the French Colonisation. However Father Malzac states Merina traditions claim a great victory over the Bara even though they had no military outpost at Ilhosy (1912:251). A former sea-captain who lived in south-eastern Madagascar between 1823 and 1837 made no mention of the Bara in a report on the different provinces and to the degree to which the new Merina power controlled them (Dargelas 1837:1-12). In 1894 just before the collapse of the Merina monarchy its official documents did not list Ibara as a tributary province (Berthier 1933:137; Michel 1957:28 note 1.) Interestingly it was Reverent Wiliam

Ellis who in 1838 mentions the Bara for the first time whilst his map although inaccurate in many respects, placed the Bara in the right region (1838:62). It is clear however that one such Zafimanely noble (Zafimanely dynasty from which the Bara among others are said to have emerged) did venture into the Merina kingdom to ask the Merina King Radama 1 (1810-1828) to arbitrate succession (Grandidier 1908:279). Michel on the other hand does not agree to succession having been the reason for the formation of the many different Bara units (1957:18) This is important in many ways because by the end of the 19th century there were three large Bara kingdoms.

The Bara-be o ccupying the Horombe Plateau, the Iantsantsa were in the East and the Imamono in the West. Two intermediary kingdoms of Vinda in the south-west and the Antivondra to the east of the Ionaivo River and two dozen lesser clans (see Capt. Vacher 1903:401-8 and Grandidier 1908:283-5). The reason for this goes back to sons of the formative period of Bara King Raikitroka believed to have ruled between 1804-1817 (dates come from newly discovered manuscript based on Betsileo and Bara traditions collected by J. Rabemanana 1912). Raikitroka's sons spread out forming the three major Bara units. Ramasoandro remained at the head of the Bara Iantsantsa. Tonanahary and Ratsmivily went westward and founded the Bara-be and the Bara-Imamono. A fourth son Ramifoky appears to be founder of a lesser Bara clan, the Manatanana. The foundation of the Vinda is variously attributed to the fifth son of Raikitroka, to one of Tonannahary's sons and even to a grandson of Andriamanely I. Faublee argued that grazing grounds compelled the various Zafimanely princes to migrate westward whilst Merina pressure who undertook military expeditions in the South east also played a role (1954:139). It was Tonanahary who is said to travel to Merina to secure an alliance against his two brothers and killed on a second visit (Du bois de la Villerabel 1900:269). The Bara-be are of interest as will be highlighted later.

Captain Vacher (1903) ethnographic data provides us with a different picture entirely. According to his data large influxes of groups fled the Merina from the east, south-east and north of Bara land. Its human geography underwent a radical change roughly between 1859 and 1890 (kent 1968:398). The Zafimanely used these 'new Bara' against their own recalcitrant subjects and many of the latter promptly left to form independent 'tariki'. Kent however points out that neither the struggles involving Raikitroka's sons as well as the migration westwards can account for the entire political history of the Bara (1968:399). Nielsen-Lund adds further that no fewer than 40 Bara kings claimed the status of 'king' and competed with one another in a pattern of constant raiding for supremacy in Bara land (1888: 443). There are too many incongruities in traditional text and elsewhere to accept the existing ideas about Bara formations. As has been written up to this point it appears there was a Bara state at least in formation by the 18th century. It only gets further complicated when you look into the 'farity'

or tribal and clan names where more revealing information becomes apparent about the Bara formation.

The Imamono name seems to be an abbreviation of 'Tsimamonolongo' by which the Western Bara were known to earlier settlers of the area in the 1860s (Grandidier 1908:282,279). In Bara speech Imamono comes out as mamunu which the conveniently phonetic loss of *tsy + longo* but also the *I* prefix for place and person. *Tsy* is a general negative whilst l*ongo* means friend or ally apparently from the Bantu *lungo/lunga* (Kent 1968: 399). In its original context Tsimamonolongo would translate as 'those who do not kill their friends'. It would seem that Ratsimivily honoured the Bara with the name Imamono which its present understanding translates as 'to kill'. Michel (1957) points out that the western Bara were in constant state of war with groups of the Fiheranana valley thus Mamunu has little to do with the original Bara inhabitants of the west.

Michel also indicates the incredulity of the Bara-be 'Great Bara' developing as a mere branch of the Iantsantsa, because Tonanahary began with a handful of followers to rule over a large prosperous group (1957:18). We shall return to them later.

The Iantsantsa offer more material for thought. Following Le Barbier, Michel translates Iantsantsa as 'sharks' (antsantsa). The selection of sharks is curious because the Iantsantsa have no memories of ever having been a coastal group. It is more conclusive and corroborating to take antsantsa as defined by the Webber dictionary as 'faute ou malediction tres ancienne qui persevere sur les descendants' (1853:59). This is noteworthy as it translates well with Bara traditions.

according to Bara tradition Renitsira, nephew of Andriamanely I was disinherited by his father Diamandana for incestuous relations with his mother (Dela Villarabel 1900:265). Diamandana on his death bed asked his brother Andriamanely I to assassinate Renitsira. Once arrangements had been made Andriamanely having taken out the spear from Renitsira's body caught a few drops of blood. A few days later 'angama' (leprosy) began to spread all over his extremities. There is significance to this tradition although a mixture of fiction and historical data the Andriamanely who did have leprosy was called Dutana (mutilated hand) (Kent 1968:400). According to Rabemanana the 'leper king' was a contemporary of the Betsileo king Andriamanalina I who died in 1790 (1912: 88). In European sources Andriamanely I died in 1653 (Flacourt 1661:40). The would be murder of Renitsira seems to be of fiction as it is composed of *reny* 'mother', *tsy* 'not' and *ra* 'blood'. The confusion between some thirteen decades hides an important aspect of dynastic change. The future Iantsantsa were in effect not of mother's blood (Kent 1968:401). This sheds some light and offers some clarity as to what and how the Bara might have come to be.

When Ramasoandro arrived to take over the eastern Bara it was easily recognised that they were *antsansta* without right to rule. In the 1650s the eastern Bara were known as *Antikondra*. The Antinkondra predate Ramasoandro by two centuries. There had to be a parent-unit for them as well (Kent 1968:401). Le Barbier points out that all subsequent divisions among the Bara derive from their parent unit the Bara-be (1916-17:66). The Imamono formerly a group of Iantsansta and Manantana migrated westward. This is attested by Charles Guillain who acted as a mediator in the first dispute between the *Masikoro* of the Fiherenana Valley and the Iantsantsa mentioned by that name some two decades before the adoption of Imamono or Tsimamonolongo (Guillain 1845:311). The Imamono capital at Ankazoabo has been dated with slight chance of error to 1838 (Grandidier and Decary 1958:170-1). At this point it would seem that the Imamono are fairly recent, the Iantsantsa are much older and the Bara-be seem to be absent in definition besides Le Barbier alluding to them being the parent unit. With this in mind, it becomes interesting to focus on a source of history by Ettiene De Flacourt.

Flacourt writes that around 1550, 70 or 80 Portuguese with a great deal of gold were killed by the Malagasy. He gave two versions of this incident. In the first a massacre took place after the Portuguese bought along all of their gold to be entertained by two brothers who came with 5-600 men (1661:32). It is the second explanation which is far more interesting as it states that the Portuguese were in conflict with each other over the gold. The captain and those who sided with him came to a site named *Varabei*. The V/B and B/V phonetic conversions are legion in Malagasy and *Varabie* can readily be recognized as Bara-be (Kent 1968:402). Therefore the earliest mention of Bara-be can be found in this mid-seventeenth century document reported by Flacourt. Flacourt mentions Bara-be as a site and not as a people.

Therefore the ethnic adoption of this name must have taken place at some point thereafter. There stands at present a whole site in Isalo termed the 'Grottes des Portuguese'. There is an anecdote to this. As mentioned already the Former Iantsansta who went westward and had disputes with the Masikoro eventually to rebrand as the Imamono yields some insight. The term Masikoro is not referenced to Malagasy origins. The term comes from elsewhere and its closest neighbour seems to be of African origin.

In Tanzania the term *Mashokora* refers to a secondary growth of scrub forest labelled by the natives on the hilly outskirts of Dar-es-Salam (Hartnoll and Couchman 1937:35). Therefore Masikoro refers to the secondary scrub forest that placates much of the intermediary plateau of southern Madagascar. The term Masikoro then has been taken to refer to the people of the interior as opposed to the *Vezo* 'people of the coast' considered now the Sakalava or Mahafaly ethnic groups. This is a plausible. A

tradition records one of Rapapango's brothers along with the Bara who followed him bringing under his authority the 'Manarilava, whose huts stood on the Isalo escarpment, the Mikeha people of the plains and the Voazimba of the rivers and sea. From this union came the Masikoro (De la Villerabel 1900:164) as the Bara were too few to impose on their new subjects their own name. Thus the Bara were probably not known to seventeenth-century European sources most likely because they were not referred to as Bara at the time.

The Bara line begins with the Zafimanely dynasty which was one branch of the Maroserana kingdom (Mervyn Brown 1978:26). As mentioned the Bara sources are mixed with incongruities and contradictions. Kent points out that the Zafimanely and the Bara share an ancestor in Rabaratavokoka and thus the Zafimanely simply altered history or more precisely their genealogy to attune to their own authority over the Bara (1968: 406-7). We shall clarify this a little further whilst it might still appear confusing.

The Bara version of Zafimanely geneology consists of five ancestors behind Andriamanely I. Andriamena, Rapapango, Andriankehoheo, Rabaratavokoka and Ravatoverery (De La Villerabel 1900:263-4). Rabaratavokoka stands out here in that his name appears also in Sakalava and Mahafaly traditions as 'Andriamandazoala' (Kent 1968:403). Suggestive links all point towards Zimbabwe. Andriamandazoala means the 'Crusher of Trees' which was one of Mwene Mutapa's titles (J.T. Bent 1893:85). Ravatoverery if broken down into its component parts translates as *ra* 'blood or noble,' *vato* 'stone', *ve/be* 'great' and *rery/irery* 'alone, without equal'. Literal translation would be 'great noble stone without equal'. Madagascar has its interesting rock formations but none attached to the Bara. James T. Bent found that a fantastic kraal called *Baramazimba* ruled by *Umgabe* (a dynastic name of the petty chief whose territory includes the Zimbabwe ruins) (*ibid* 65-6). If we keep following through with these links we arrive to *Ngabe* which is equivalent to *Umgabe*, an honorific title given to elders in many parts of Madagascar.

In Bara folkore early sacerdotal persons (*mpamoha)* were possessed by spirits of great ancestors called *Angabe* in much the same manner as the Shona *Masvikora (*Kent 1968:404). In one single tradition Rabaratavokoka's name is followed by the suffix *tsimbaby* (Firinga 1901: 664) which can be interpreted as a corruption of Zimbabwe. It is also not clear whether Rabaratavokoka and Ravatoverery are inferring to the same person either. What is clear however is that Zafimanely could not Antedate Andriamanely I. Flacourt mentions Andriamanely I was beginning to build a cattle-empire in the 1640s and that in 1650s his brothers the Zafimanely properly speaking are spreading into the interior. The ashes of the once powerful Masikoro state was all around them (1661:44). Andriamanely I himself was a Maroserana ruler of the Mahafaly (Kent 1968:406). Along this line of history the Maroserana

kingdom would be where the Bara among many other groups could potentially find one part of their ancestral origin.

As Kent would state the Bara political history did not begin at all with the Zafimanely, their advent in Ibara represents a hitherto unsuspected dynastic change, unsuspected both because traditions were altered and the time-depth is much greater than otherwise stated (*ibid:* 407).

In sum Andriamanely I died before all the Bara could be bought under one single authority. The Zafimanely imposed themselves gradually in the absence of any pre-eminent local family. Raikitroka by the turn of the nineteenth century managed to unify most of the Bara clans before it saw a new subdivision. There is also the question of the African influence. Many authors have made their contributions towards the African influence of the Bara, not to state the Maroserana links with Zimbabwe mentioned already. Cowan in the 1880's already suggested the Bara came from Africa (1882:521-37) along with the Bara showing the most African traits (L.Catat 1895:359). Gabriel Ferrand suggested the African Mbara living west of Lake Nyassa as possible ancestors (1908:426-7). Many others have suggested African origins but in reality the picture is rather different. Most certainly the Bara at present show an indication of African roots identifiable through some of their customs and traditions but this cannot solely be the case. The Beronono Bara are devoid of any postulation regards their own origin but simply state they are 'Bara'. For now then the Bara origins is a working progress but from what can be gleamed from historical and present sources it proves to be a fascinating and wild exploration.

My fieldtrips into Bara land and the Beronono Bara's world will attempt to highlight the plasticity of 'historical presence' in terms of how it manifests itself in the everyday lives of people. It might not necessarily be a central theme of my research to situate the Beronono Bara in a historical narrative. I am more concerned with the narrative that is the continuous present. My first goal from the onset is to be able to live among the Beronono Bara and from there the journey will proceed onwards, always uncovering the 'unknown' from which my experiences and gained knowledge(s) with any of the Beronono Bara will be detailed out in a narrative that follows…

Scanning Through the Anthropology of Madagascar

Much of the anthropological scholarship on Madagascar has historically focused on specific regions and peoples, particularly the Merina of the highlands and the Sakalava of the northwest. This emphasis often comes at the expense of more inland or marginalized groups, such as the Bara. Earlier accounts of Madagascar, including those discussing Bara origins, were typically authored by missionaries, colonial officials, or passing seafarers. Notable examples include Robert Drury's Madagascar (1729) and Journal During Fifteen Years' Captivity on That Island. While these works are peripheral to my research, they provide insight into colonial-era perceptions of the island.

Early anthropology in Madagascar often prioritized inquiries related to ritual and memory, particularly through the lens of ancestor worship and its role in social reproduction. These studies examined how ritualized memory-making preserved historical identity amid shifting political landscapes. Works such as Maurice Bloch's The Past and the Present (1977), Michael Lambek's The Weight of the Past (2022), Ron Emoff's Recollecting from the Past (2022), and Jennifer Cole's Forget Colonialism? (2001) all emphasized that ancestral practices were crucial not only to memory but also to the dynamics of power, gender, and status in Malagasy life. Cole, in particular, highlighted the idea that the Malagasy people adapt commemorative rituals to address social change, proposing a theory of ritual as both remembrance and resistance.

Some anthropologists have moved beyond an ancestor-focused analysis to explore how memory and spirit practices serve as dynamic, future-oriented forms. For instance, Hilde Nielssen argued in Ritual Imagination (2011) that Tromba spirit possession among the Betsimisaraka is not merely backward-looking but also constitutes a forward-facing, creative process. Such studies challenge earlier portrayals of ancestral rites as static traditions, illustrating instead that they are contested and evolving.

Broader themes, such as colonial haunting, the role of the foreigner (vazaha), and questions of identity, recur in studies like Cole and Karen Middleton's Rethinking Ancestors and Colonial Power in Madagascar (2001), which examined the complex interrelations of colonial and local categories. Rita Astuti's People of the Sea (1995), although ethnographically focused on the Vezo, sheds light on temporal consciousness and adaptive strategies in the southwestern region. Lesley Sharp's The Sacrificed Generation (2002) captures how colonial legacies continue to shape moral and bodily experiences in the post-colonial present.

While ritual and memory dominate much of the literature, tourism and conservation remain relatively underexplored. David Picard and Catarina Moreira's work on hospitality and dispossession in the southwest (2015, 2016) offers valuable insights into the emotional and economic dimensions of tourist encounters. Similarly, Genese Marie Sodikoff's Forest and Labor in Madagascar (2012) provides an important critique of ecotourism, demonstrating how conservation initiatives often conflict with local cosmologies and economic needs. Her analysis of the moral and material tensions between global conservation agendas and indigenous land practices resonates strongly with the conservation-tourism entanglements I observed in Bara country.

The Bara have received relatively little sustained attention from Western anthropologists compared to the Merina or Sakalava. Aside from a few historical sources and scattered references, the existing literature on the Bara is limited. My thesis aims to help fill this gap—not as an exercise in salvage anthropology (Marcus & Fischer, 1986), but as a contemporary ethnography that explores tourism, conservation, and cosmology in a region largely overlooked by mainstream scholarship.

To better situate my work within the broader anthropological literature on Madagascar, I will briefly explore some key authors whose contributions have shaped the field. This is not an exhaustive review but rather an intellectual waypoint map—charting where others have delved deeply, explored ancestral landscapes, and theorized Malagasy life in all its historical, ritual, and political complexity. From tombs and kingships to colonial ghosts and ethical silences, these scholars offer diverse perspectives through which Madagascar has been interpreted. I outline their work here not only to acknowledge the terrain I am navigating but also to clarify the gaps and divergences where my own ethnography of the Bara begins. Think of it as a timeline—less linear and more spiraled—where I arrive at the end, a little dust-covered, with a research and tourist permit in one hand.

Maurice Bloch – Building Power through Ritual and the Dead

Legacy: The ritual architecture of Merina society, and how power and memory are constructed through ceremonial repetition.

Key Works:

- Placing the Dead (1971/1993)

- From Blessing to Violence (1986/1996)

- Prey into Hunter (1992)

- How We Think They Think (1998)

Themes:

- Ancestor worship and burial rites as political structures

- The continuity of kinship, ritual violence, and social reproduction

- Temporality and historicity as social technologies

Maurice Bloch's ethnographic and theoretical contributions are foundational in the anthropology of Madagascar, particularly in understanding how memory, authority, and kinship intersect through ritual practices. His fieldwork, primarily among the Merina people of the central highlands, explored how power is constructed and naturalized through ceremonies of ancestor worship and the symbolic placement of the dead. In Placing the Dead (1971), Bloch argues that Merina tomb rituals do more than commemorate the deceased; they reorder the social world by reinforcing lineage ties and affirming political structures rooted in ancestry. His interest in ritual as a performative and ideological tool led to his later work, From Blessing to Violence (1986), where he analyzed circumcision ceremonies not merely as rites of passage but as mechanisms of state-like control and symbolic domination.

Bloch's work shifted the anthropological focus from static understandings of tradition to dynamic processes of social reproduction. He used Madagascar as a platform to engage in broader anthropological debates about ideology, ritual language, and the reproduction of political forms. His studies demonstrate how Merina ritual practices draw on the past to assert control over the present, highlighting that history is not just something to be remembered but is actively created through ritual. Bloch's long engagement with Madagascar has sparked significant discussions in the anthropology of religion and memory, and his writings continue to influence studies on ritual power and temporality in postcolonial contexts.

Gillian Feeley-Harnik – Divine Kingship and Cosmopolitical Histories

Legacy: A comprehensive ethnographic exploration of sacrificial practices, kingship, and the cosmological foundations of political life among the Sakalava people.

Key Works:

- Divine Kingship and the Meaning of History among the Sakalava (1978)

- A Green Estate: Restoring Independence in Madagascar (1991)

Themes:

- Divine kingship and political theology

- Gender, sacrifice, and the management of fertility

- The historical imagination in postcolonial Madagascar

Gillian Feeley-Harnik conducted groundbreaking research among the Sakalava of Madagascar's northwest coast, producing one of the most detailed ethnographies of divine kingship in Africa. In her influential essay, "*Divine Kingship and the Meaning of History among the Sakalava*" (1978), she examines how political authority is closely intertwined with sacrificial and spiritual practices. Her research highlights that kingship among the Sakalava is not solely inherited or legitimized through violence; rather, it is cultivated through the ongoing ritual exchange with ancestors and the landscape. In her view, sacrifice serves both as a religious act and a historical one—an offering to ancestors that reaffirms social order and reshapes historical memory.

Feeley-Harnik's subsequent work further explored the religious politics surrounding fertility, gender, and land. She analyzed how rituals involving food, exchange, and life cycles act as significant mediators between individuals and the broader cosmos. In *A Green Estate* (1991), she interprets the postcolonial nation as a ritual landscape shaped by the tensions between independence, tradition, and evolving meanings of authority. Her research demonstrates the intricate connections between kinship, agriculture, cosmology, and political economy in everyday life. Through her long-term engagement with the Sakalava, Feeley-Harnik provided a complex and cosmologically rich account of how the Malagasy people anchor their history in ritual acts of bodily and spiritual renewal.

Jennifer Cole – Memory, Youth, and the Haunted Present

Legacy: Anthropologist of memory and transformation—demonstrating how people use ritual to reinterpret both the colonial past and contemporary precarity.

Key Works:

- Forget Colonialism? Sacrifice and the Art of Memory in Madagascar (2001)

- Sex and Salvation: Imagining the Future in Madagascar (2010)

Themes:

- The politics of remembrance and sacrifice

- Colonial hauntings in ritual and memory

- Youth, gender, and aspiration in the neoliberal present

Jennifer Cole's research in southeastern Madagascar, particularly in Farafangana, adds a crucial perspective to the study of memory, colonial legacy, and intergenerational change. In Forget Colonialism? Sacrifice and the Art of Memory in Madagascar (2001), Cole argues that Malagasy ritual practices—especially those involving sacrifice—are essential to understanding how individuals and communities remember, reinterpret, and sometimes actively rewrite their colonial past. She examines how people selectively recall certain histories, particularly those involving collaboration or humiliation under colonial rule, in order to create new moral claims in the present. Her writing emphasizes that memory is not just about preserving the past; it is about managing its burdens and haunting power.

In her later work, Sex and Salvation (2010), Cole explores youth aspirations, gender, and religious transformation in a rapidly changing neoliberal landscape. She illustrates how young women navigate the intersections of traditional cosmologies, colonial legacies, and evangelical Christianity while pursuing moral personhood and economic opportunities. Cole's ethnography reveals how people in Madagascar reshape their identities amid significant social transformations while remaining connected to an unfinished past. Her work bridges the anthropology of memory with that of subjectivity, demonstrating how rituals of sacrifice, forgetting, and rebirth function at both individual and collective levels.

David Graeber – Slavery's Afterlives and Ethical Absences

Legacy: This work unveils the lingering moral economies of slavery and freedom, examining how historical absences create contemporary moral ambivalence.

Key Works:

- Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar (2007)

- Possibilities (2007)

Themes:

- Slavery, haunting, and unspoken histories

- Provincial Autonomous Zones (PAZ) and state absence

- Anarchist anthropology and lived ethical systems

David Graeber approached Madagascar from a radically different perspective, focusing on silence, absence, and historical discontinuity as active forces that shape social life. His fieldwork in Betafo, a rural town in the highlands, explored the lingering ghosts of slavery—both metaphorical and real—in a society where its memory is often suppressed. In Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar (2007), Graeber describes how local communities navigate a moral landscape filled with absences: while people do not discuss their descent from slaves, the distinctions between the "free" and those "descended" continue to influence land rights, marriage, and political authority. Rather than viewing this as denial, Graeber interprets the refusal to narrate history as a creative and deeply moral act, where people construct their lives within the silences.

His notion of "Possibility" arises directly from these Malagasy landscapes. In Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire (2007), Graeber explores "Provincial Autonomous Zones"—areas where state power is either a distant abstraction or a negotiated fiction. Madagascar serves as an ethnographic context for Graeber's broader critiques of statehood, capitalism, and the anthropology of power. His anarchist commitments shine through in his appreciation of local strategies for self-rule and moral improvisation. In Madagascar, Graeber discovered a social world filled with complex ethics, both spoken and unspoken histories. His work broadened anthropological focus on how people shape their futures through ethically charged acts of forgetfulness and refusal.

And Then I Wandered In… (2017–2019)

While Bloch worked in the Merina highlands, exploring their complex political rituals—where tombs anchor collective memory and power flows like honey from the mouths of elders—Graeber crafted haunting narratives from Betafo's post-slavery silences, paying close attention to the unspoken truths within the community. Feeley-Harnik, on the other hand, traced the divine in the coastal plains, where Sakalava kings continued to exert influence from beyond the grave, their power preserved through ritual feasts and deep-rooted kinship. Meanwhile, Jennifer Cole focused on the southeast, where youth carried the weight of colonial memory through sacrifice and forgetting, seeking solace in churches, whispered rituals, and the complexities of neoliberal influences.

Their collective work—mapping tombs and ghosts, sacred rice and memorial sacrifices—illuminated Madagascar's intricate entanglements of history, sovereignty, and power.

As for me, I ventured further inland to Bara country, a place where the state seems to dissolve like red dust on the horizon, where tourism trickles in with sun hats and smartphones, and where cattle paths intersect with conservation plans. In a region where Feeley-Harnik's royal rituals unfolded in shrines and Cole's youth grappled with their ghostly burdens, my informants were both guiding tourists by day and consulting their ancestors by night. Where Bloch discovered ritual logic and Graeber found moral ambiguities, I encountered improvisation—an awkward intertwining of tourism with traditional practices, the friction between eco-friendly ideals and zebu herding, and the cosmological complexities linking ancestral lands with bureaucratic regulations.

My ethnography, much like a wandering zebu, explores the areas where their paths did not converge—tracing memory not solely through tombs or spirits, but through travel permits, school chalk, WhatsApp voice notes, and evening conversations about tourists, cattle, and the value of meaning.

Tracing Positionality

My identity as an author is not singular, but rather a layered crossing—an intersection between archaeologist and anthropologist, insider and outsider, visibility and perception. This section explores how my positionality, rather than representing a fixed standpoint, unfolds as a dynamic terrain—a palimpsest of roles, each inscribed over another, leaving traces that bleed through the layers. This boundary-crossing did not destabilize the research; instead, it became the very condition of it. Ethnography, like performance, is not a stable portrait but a rehearsal of identities that are sometimes simultaneous and often in tension. Through moments of reflexivity, vulnerability, and affective attunement, I came to view positionality not as a limitation but as the generative space of fieldwork.

Throughout the text, I shift between an outsider's perspective and that of a temporary insider. I allowed the interplay between my academic dualism—struggling for authority over the research process—to remain visible. There is a growing anthropological tradition that seeks to showcase this type of reflexive methodology. Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2020) discusses his dilemmas regarding solidarity and humanitarian action through this autobiographical split, a methodological trick he previously applied in his work on Emberá tourism (2016). Theodossopoulos illustrates his "split" between a soft or hard Marxist subjectivity, as well as between his empiricist and post-structuralist authorial selves. This split enables the author to grasp the complexity of the ethnographic project. An

ethnographer's mind houses not just one voice, but many: the voices of different respondents and the echoes of those voices in the ethnographer's thoughts.

By employing this method, the emerging dialectic—the exchange of opposing views within intersubjective ambiguities (Jackson 1998)—can be understood from the author's own perspective during the research. The 'graphic' representation of the authorial dilemmas captures the ambiance and setting of the researcher's workplace during the fieldwork, simultaneously opening up the ethnographic imagination rather than closing it (Ingold 2011). This method aligns with a growing anthropological tradition of reflexive methodology, where the ethnographer's own multiplicity becomes a critical tool rather than a limitation. While this reflexive approach has gained increasing visibility in contemporary anthropology, earlier scholars were already grappling with similar concerns. Edwin Wilmsen's (1989) call for a political economy approach in Land Filled with Flies challenged static notions of field relations, urging ethnographers to account for the historical and material layers that influence interactions and shape the voices heard. Similarly, James Boon (1982), in Other Tribes, Other Scribes, revealed that the writing of culture is itself a layered inscription process—never neutral and always reflective of the shifting positionality of the ethnographer. In different ways, Wilmsen and Boon anticipated the more explicit autobiographical split described by Theodossopoulos (2020) and others, demonstrating that ethnographic authority has long been a site of tension, negotiation, and political implication.

This text resonates with the division between my anthropological and archaeological identities during my research. Over time, the archaeological aspect gradually gives way to my emerging anthropological self. To capture the interplay of these two perspectives during my fieldwork, I employed a specific representational device—a reflexive ambivalence or 'split'—which highlights the hybrid nature of anthropological fieldwork and the transformation of fieldwork experiences through writing.

Much like Wilmsen's rejection of the observer as a neutral, timeless recorder of "traditional" life, my shifting between archaeological and anthropological modes of thinking reveals how fieldwork itself transforms the researcher. Wilmsen's insistence that ethnographic authority must account for its historical embeddedness resonates with my own methodological ambivalence. The 'split' between my disciplinary identities is not merely stylistic but is a response to how the field reshapes the author.

Nigel Rapport's (1993) vision of a "diverse world" where multiple realities coexist, and where personal identity must remain fluid and open-ended, provides an important context for sustaining such multiplicities within the ethnographic project. In his portrayal of villagers in Wanet, England, Rapport

argues that worldviews cannot be simplified into a cohesive cultural logic—they are intrinsically personal. My reflexive ambivalence—my movement between different disciplinary selves and roles during fieldwork—resonates with Rapport's call to honor the singular, subjective nature of both the informant and the ethnographer. Like Rapport's villagers, the Bara individuals I encountered did not simply represent a monolithic "culture" but expressed themselves through diverging and often contradictory narratives. The richness of fieldwork lies in allowing these worldviews to remain diverse, even as they are interpreted through the lens of the anthropologist.

I am reminded of Michael Taussig's (1993) exploration of the mimetic faculty—the idea that we do not simply observe the world but reperform it, becoming entwined with it. In Mimesis and Alterity, Taussig illustrates how proximity between self and other generates not only knowledge, but also confusion, doubling, and creative misrecognition. These conditions—what he might call the magic of the real—accurately describe my own shifting positionality. The field becomes a space where knowledge and personhood are mutually entangled. As I engaged with the ethnographic scene, I began to embody the field—not as a tidy set of data, but as fragments, gestures, and half-formed translations.

Thus, my positionality was not just an intellectual puzzle; it became embodied. Following Rebecca Schneider's (2017) insights in In Our Hands, the researcher's body turns into a vessel of accumulated gestures, an archive of moments that are not merely remembered but materially carried forward and re-enacted. Schneider's notion that history lingers in the performing body helped me realize that my negotiation between archaeologist and anthropologist, outsider and insider, was not solely cognitive. It was lived, gestured, and carried into every movement, every moment of speech or silence.

My gradual realizations came through time spent with the Bara, during which I shared and exchanged knowledge and experiences, followed by reflection on the situations I encountered while interacting with them. Early in my research, I found myself in an in-between space: academically credentialed yet distant from those among whom I lived. To the Bara, I was labeled a 'Vazaha'—an outsider—and this label became both a marker of separation and the starting point of my quest to understand my perceived status. My experience of being called 'Vazaha' and the shifting social dynamics I navigated echo what Wilmsen (1989) urges anthropologists to confront: the broader historical and political forces that precede and shape our fieldwork interactions. While I consider my positionality a methodological challenge, Wilmsen would remind us that such positioning is never neutral; it is embedded in colonial histories, land alienation, and discourses of outsiderhood. Boon (1982) would add that even this very reflection is a kind of rhetorical move, embedded in the semiotic strategies that constitute anthropological writing itself. The label 'Vazaha,' in this light, is not merely a social

marker but a symbolic signifier within a shared discursive field that I both occupy and narrate. Taussig would likely urge us to notice how this label resists full translation—it lingers in the air between speaker and listener, akin to his depiction of the dead man in *I Swear I Saw This* (2011), refusing to settle into clarity. Through Rapport's lens, we recognize that my interpretation of this positional label—my discomfort, my attempts to renegotiate it, or even play with it—is itself a meaningful data point. Through Schneider's perspective, we understand that it is not just a name but also a gesture—a repeated framing of my presence—felt as much physically as it is linguistically spoken.

The quest to understand my own perceived status became a personal pursuit during my fieldwork. This journey often revealed itself in moments of shared interaction, where I would steer the conversation toward it. However, as I shared sincere moments with travelers and locals, I found myself becoming vulnerable. This vulnerability inadvertently helped build trust and form bonds that I did not fully recognize at the time. Anthropologists refer to this bond as “rapport,” which created a unique ‘space’ of sociality between us. In those moments of interaction, I was no longer just a tourist, and they were no longer just locals; we had become, at least for a brief time, simply ‘us.’

In reviewing these interactions, I found it valuable to view my fieldwork encounters as conversational interviews. By post-analyzing my experiences and reflecting on the collectively embodied memory making, I shared these insights with my Bara and post-tourist friends. After multiple encounters, our continued interactions evolved from merely ‘conversations’ to ‘supervision sessions.’ Through the bonds we formed, we began to observe one another during our encounters, reflecting on whether our views and opinions had changed since our last dialogues. This approach helped me understand why I became close to certain individuals during my fieldwork. My exploration of my own positionality added intriguing complexity to my study of Bara indigenous tourism. I view this complexity as the most productive lesson I gleaned from my fieldwork experience.

These layered experiences, accumulated over time, align with what Rebecca Schneider (2017) describes as the gestural archive—knowledge transmitted not just through text but also through embodied action and presence. My body became a vessel of history, inscribed with the layers of encounters I experienced. This created a palimpsest of my roles as both anthropologist and archaeologist, and when it came to oscillating between being an outsider and a guest. Through gestures, emotions, and repetition, I crossed boundaries—not only between myself and others but also within myself. Schneider’s assertion that bodies carry, mutate, and transmit history over time resonates with my sense of how fieldwork shaped my identity.

As Taussig reminds us in I Swear I Saw This, the ethnographic process involves uncertain witnessing, where the acts of recording and living blur together. Ethnographic memory becomes unreliable and speculative, yet it is powerful in its incompleteness. Reflexivity requires more than just accounting for one's presence; it invites us to remain open to disruption, entanglement, and not knowing. The inability to settle into a fixed position allows for a vibrant ethnographic imagination. My methodological split—oscillating between analytical clarity and lived uncertainty—mirrors what Taussig describes as the "notebook effect": a persistent reminder that ethnography is not a neat narrative but rather a mix of impressions, symbols, and incomplete meanings. This instability, rather than being resolved, becomes generative. While Wilmsen emphasizes political accountability and Boon interrogates semiotic positioning, Taussig encourages us to embrace the blur and seek meaning in what resists clear articulation.

Thus, my positional ambivalence—reflected in my split voice, outsider label, and entanglement in the field—emerges not as an obstacle to ethnography but as its very condition of possibility. My identity, viewed through the layers of interaction, memory, mimicry, and gesture, constitutes a living palimpsest of my fieldwork experience. Ethnographic knowledge is not merely retrieved from the field; it is co-composed, enacted, and performed. It is within these layered and often conflicting perspectives that the ethnographic imagination is most vividly realized. Consequently, positional ambivalence is not a limitation but a generative force—an epistemological asset that enriches ethnographic inquiry. It is from this space of fluid positionality that I will now advance to a broader theoretical grounding in the Anthropology of Tourism in Chapter 2.

2

Anthropology Of Tourism

The first anthropological study of tourism was undertaken by Theron A. Nunez Jr in 1963 looking at weekend tourists in a Mexican village, while the validation of tourism as an appropriate field of anthropological study was perhaps first taken to heart by E. Cohen in 1972. Although Cohen emphasized how tourism was relevant to sociology at the time, this had strong implications for later anthropological involvement. Cohen's work marked the 1970s as the decade for the brave – those who recognised that tourism had become too globally and locally significant to be ignored and that it needed to be taken seriously by Anthropologists.

Valene Smith organized the first American Anthropological Association symposia on Tourism in 1974, the papers of which became *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (1977), which was one of the starting points of the subject looking at hospitality (Scott & Selwyn 2010: 8). By the late 1980s Nelson Graburn—who had been publishing in the field for over 10 years—described tourism as an entirely suitable yet neglected topic for anthropologists (Crick 1988:64). By the 1990's tourism became a much more widely accepted topic of study in anthropology as indicated by works like '*Insiders and Outsider* (Jackie Waldren 1996) and Tom Selwyn's '*The Anthropology of Tourism'* and '*Chasing Myths: Post-Modernity and authenticity'* both published in 1994. Although at the periphery of mainstream anthropology, the anthropologists of tourism started collaborating, as indicated by a steady production of edited volumes, such as [volumes by Boissevain, and Abram and Waldren]. By the turn of the 21st century, the anthropology of tourism had become what Bourdieu (1984) will call an intellectual field.

Early Literature

In most of the early interdisciplinary literature on tourism we can detect a focus on its economic consequences. Less attention was paid to the social impact of tourism for the host communities and the cultural, political, or religious repercussions. Anthropologists initially argued for the negative side, often underestimating the transformative benefits that tourism can inspire among local communities. In turn, this led authors such as Turner and Ash (1975), Mathieson and Wall (1982), Smith (1989a), and Lea (1988) to claim that outside-run tourism industries would lead to a form of imperialism and covertly develop into a form of neo-colonialism (Burns 2004: 5).

The early pioneers of tourism analysis drew upon established theoretical models within the anthropological domain to examine the concept and experience of tourism. For instance, Graburn's (1977) investigation into tourism as a ritualistic and sacred journey builds upon Durkheim's (1915)

conceptualization of the sacred and the profane. Similarly, Turner and Turner (1978) draw from van Gennep's (1908) notion of transitioning between social categories to propose that travel which is seen as a transitional phase in life, for instance, between high school and university or between university and working world. Within this framework, tourism is regarded as a ritual or rite of passage, wherein tourists, akin to pilgrims or initiates, progress through three distinct stages: 1) separation, 2) liminality, and 3) reintegration. This tourism analysis exemplifies Victor Turner's influential classical perspective, which held significant sway during that period.

Maccannell (1976) and Cohen (1979) followed a parallel direction focused analytically on the value systems of the modern world. Modernity for MacCannell was treated as ridden with alienation, fragmentation and superficiality, which in turn inspires a search for the authentic, a concept I will explore later in this thesis. MacCannell was highly influential in developing a theory of tourism in the context of modernity. In fact, 'much early work by anthropologists began as a spin-off from other research on acculturation or development' (Nash 1995:181).

Early scholarly endeavours examined the social, cultural, and environmental repercussions on the communities designated as "hosts" (Finley and Watson 1975; Smith 1977). These works primarily relied on the simplistic acculturation model introduced by Nunez in 1963. Notably, these early works implicitly or explicitly conveyed the notion that tourism's influence on host communities was predominantly adverse (Stronza 2001:268). Conceptions ranged from attributing tourism as the catalyst for comprehensive value transformations (Crick 1989:308) to wreaking havoc in the face of social and cultural metamorphosis (Rossel 1998:1). Consequently, the anthropological scrutiny of tourism seemed to paint an unfavourable picture, depicting it as bereft of any beneficial elements for local communities and their cultures. Nevertheless, recent research has gradually departed from the impact model and the dichotomy of host and guest, recognizing an increasingly discernible pattern of purposeful actions undertaken by all involved parties and a significantly more intricate dynamic at play (see Abram et al. 1997; Daher 2000).

Socio-Cultural Vs Economic Impacts

Nunez (1963:347) characterized tourism as a laboratory scenario wherein the objective was to examine the process of acculturation arising from interactions between tourists, representative of "donor" cultures, and locals, representative of "recipient" cultures. It is generally observed that most anthropologists refrain from employing the term "acculturation," which carries inherent problematic

implications rooted in an essentialist understanding of culture as a distinct and bounded entity. The split in the tourism literature can be encapsulated within two significant perspectives. The first perspective predominantly views tourism through the lens of culture loss, emphasizing the discernible impacts that external influences exert on the socio-cultural fabric of societies and the subsequent economic disruptions accompanying tourism. Conversely, the second perspective adopted by anthropologists does not conclude the perceived impacts on societies as indicative of cultural loss. Instead, it shifts attention towards the actors and agents involved in tourism, highlighting the underlying exchange dynamics between hosts and guests.

Culture loss

The phenomenon of identity/cultural loss has been examined in anthropological research, exemplified by case studies including those immortalized by Greenwood (1977) where a festival in the Basque town of Fuenterrabia lost its cultural/symbolic meaning once it opened to tourists. We see similar examples in descriptions of Aboriginal bark paintings (Hall 1994) and Balinese culture presented as having become so commodified that it is non-distinguishable to the locals themselves (Picard 1990).
Given the nascent stage of the anthropology of tourism during this period, it is unsurprising that the impact models exhibited a negative portrayal of the cultures examined by anthropologists studying tourism. Early investigations tended to oversimplify the effects of tourism on societies, focusing primarily on analyzing the impacts. Consequently, many preliminary studies reached the inevitable conclusion of "culture loss" due to tourism. For instance, Gamper (1981) exemplifies this trend by demonstrating how individuals from Southern Austria alter their attire during the tourist season to don traditional costumes. Another illustration is the temporary closure of Amsterdam pizzerias and Maltese restaurants for a month during winter to accommodate the summer tourist season in their respective regions (Boissevain ed 1996:11)

In addition to cultural concerns, anthropologists initially expressed apprehension regarding the negative economic consequences of tourism and tourists on local communities. Oppermann (1998) emphasizes that instead of alleviating poverty, tourism introduced a range of social problems, such as the emergence of currency black markets, drug-related issues, and prostitution. Fluctuating levels of popularity in destinations further contribute to the adverse economic impact. For example, ski resorts facing droughts and insufficient snowfall may witness a decline in visitor numbers and unexpected low turnout, thereby disrupting the local economy and its underlying structure (Smith 1989:8). Additionally, the economic prospects of tourism are highly sensitive to external factors beyond the

control of local economies, including currency fluctuations and political climate (Ibid.). Concerns arise when national and regional tourism authorities commodify and market local culture without consulting the inhabitants, raising issues of cultural exploitation (Greenwood 1989:180).

Although I am not attracted to such pessimistic interpretation of tourism, it is undeniable that modern cultures can become much more important as worldwide cultural homogenization continues to accelerate. Jeremy Boissevain captures much of this problem when he states cultural tourists often destroy the very culture they come to visit, demolishing tranquility and the environment, forcing up real estate costs and driving away the local populations, transforming a living town into an attraction, a museum occupied by the tourist and heritage industry (1996: 8). The assertion made by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) resonates with the idea that tourism presents the world in a museum-like manner.

How can one assert that tourists are responsible for the destruction of Bara culture? The answer hinges on our understanding of culture loss. Are we suggesting that the hosts have involuntarily lost something or that it has undergone a complete transformation? Should cultures be viewed as fragile vessels that can be irreversibly shattered, as Ruth Benedict (1934) contends? Several contemporary anthropologists challenge this possibility (see Carrithers 1992; Sahlins 1999), and I will elucidate their perspective in the concluding section. Let me provide a concise example that encourages nuanced contemplation: the art of Bara basketry. Formerly created for local use and inter-village trade, Bara basketry has now adapted to the presence of outsiders (tourists), with the Bara producing and selling baskets specifically for this market.

Moreover, these baskets incorporate additional colours that would otherwise be unnecessary for village use. Does this signify a fundamental alteration of Bara culture in an alienating direction? To address such queries, I posit that an essential aspect of understanding the true nature of tourism lies in our commitment to actively listen to the individuals involved in the enterprise, as they possess invaluable insights and teachings that shed light on the actual workings of tourism from their unique perspectives. Bara basket makers perceive themselves as independent of the tourist economy. While they appreciate the supplemental income it brings, they emphasize their enjoyment of the creative craftsmanship involved in basket making. The emergence of new designs and color variations exemplify Bara creativity. These initial reflections prompt us to critically examine commodification in tourism and challenge Greenwood's pessimistic thesis of culture loss. I will revisit this issue in Chapter 7.

Opening Our Eyes To See The Reconstitutive Properties Of Tourism

Examining the positive impacts of tourism on local communities or regions necessitates a comprehensive and critical analysis. Chambers (1999:22) asserts the significance of adopting a nuanced perspective, cautioning against an overly narrow focus on tourists that limits our understanding of the multifaceted nature of contemporary tourism. In this regard, Aihwa Ong highlights a critical omission in anthropological scholarship, arguing that excessive emphasis has been placed on the conceptualisation of imaginaries and cultural landscapes resulting from transnational flows. At the same time, insufficient attention has been directed towards the diverse actors and agents who actively participate in these movements and navigate the intricate intercultural dynamics (1999:93). Hence, in order to gain a thorough understanding of the positive aspects of tourism, it is crucial to analyse not only the visible manifestations of tourism but also the intricate dynamics and interactions among the individuals and groups who contribute to its realisation. We can see this perspective encapsulated in Silverman's portrait of the Latmul people of Papua New Guinea, who "act with intention and strategy and exercise creative creativity in the context of their interactions with outsiders" (2001:105.)

Examining the benefits and advantages that tourism affords to local populations warrants a thorough and nuanced analysis. Smith (1989:6), for instance, emphasises the economic benefits associated with tourism, highlighting the multiplier effect wherein funds circulate multiple times within the local economy, thus providing direct advantages to non-tourism-related local businesses. Moreover, Smith notes that certain societies do not perceive tourism as an agent of cultural transformation. As exemplified by the Tana Toraja peoples of Indonesia, who are exposed to the world through television daily, tourism is accepted as an integral part of their lives (Smith 1989:9). Additionally, various scholars posit that tourism can contribute to the preservation and reinforcement of native people's identity. Mansperger (1995:92) suggests that tourism can assist in retaining cultural identity, while Smith (1982:26) argues that it can reinforce ethnic identity. Furthermore, Van den Berghe (1994:17) contends that tourism has the potential to spark a renaissance of native cultures or the revival of ethnic traditions. The strategic promotion of destinations based on their ethnic or cultural attributes can also serve local interests by revitalising abandoned traditions and fostering community engagement (Medina 2003)

The insights above stress that tourism need not invariably result in negative consequences for local populations. Host communities may bear the burden of resource degradation (Stonich 2000), yet they

can also be resource stewards, actively safeguarding their natural assets (Young 1999). While it is true that tourists may venture beyond the confines of prescribed activities and impinge upon smaller communities, these communities, once acclimated to the presence of outsiders and tourists, develop the capacity to effectively protect their interests (Cohen 1979:24; Pi-Sunyer 1989). As Boissevain elucidates, this dynamic empowers communities to negotiate for increased rights and influence (ed. 1996:7), fostering a heightened self-awareness, albeit with potential beneficial and adverse consequences. Theodossopoulos's (2016) work with indigenous tourism underscores the role of tourism in cultivating self-awareness and enhancing cultural and political representation.

The prevailing discourse within the field of anthropology reveals a notable inclination among scholars to emphasise the favourable outcomes of tourism for peripheral societies, thereby overshadowing pessimistic narratives. Smith (1989:16) offers a compelling perspective by cautioning against scapegoating tourism and tourists as solely responsible for the broader societal predicaments.

In this regard, tourism holds the potential to bring about profound transformations and unleash creative forces within indigenous communities, leading to the revitalisation and reaffirmation of their cultural traditions. For the Bara community, a distinct indigenous group, their collective identity is encapsulated in the simple yet profound phrase "we are Bara," which encompasses the essence of their culture and way of life. This intrinsic understanding, difficult to articulate in words, can only be truly felt and experienced when immersed in the Bara lands.

One notable effect of tourism on the Bara community is reinforcing their cultural identity. Through tourism, indigenous communities like the Bara can proudly showcase their rich cultural heritage, allowing them to reclaim and assert their unique identity amidst external influences. Cultural performances, traditional crafts, storytelling, and various forms of cultural expression become channels through which indigenous communities reaffirm their deeply held values and practices, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among community members.

However, it is crucial to approach tourism in Bara indigenous communities with utmost caution and respect. Tourism must align with the community's values, and priorities. And aspirations. Granting indigenous communities control over tourism development and decision-making processes becomes paramount to prevent exploitation and cultural commodification. By prioritising sustainable tourism practices that emphasise community involvement, cultural authenticity, and environmental stewardship, tourism's positive reconstitutive and creative effects can be maximised for indigenous communities.

Alternative Tourism

Ecotourism has the potentiality of being a transformative and socially sensitive form of tourism, particularly due to its small-scale local orientation, sheds light on how the tourism discourse has begun to promote and encourage the protection of local resources, culture, and values, ultimately fostering sustainability.

Ecotourism generally refers to nature-based tourism that is managed in a sustainable manner, supports conservation efforts, and promotes environmental education (Buckley 1994:661). It offers an opportunity for both hosts and guests to engage in positive and meaningful interactions and shared experiences (Eadington and Smith 1992:3). In contrast to mass tourism, which has faced criticism for being shallow and degrading, new tourism practices, including ecotourism, have been viewed more favourably (Munt 1994:50). However, it is important to note that these new tourism practices are not without their critiques. Begley (1996) and Giannecchini (1993) argue that excessive and unregulated ecotourism can have detrimental effects, such as environmental degradation and disturbances to wildlife and local communities. Instances of sabotage against ecotourism ventures have also been reported, such as the case of the Kuna in Panama burning down a hotel twice and the attack on a hotel owner described by Bennett (1999), and the burning down of a handcraft centre by locals in the village of Maya Centre in Belize, as documented by Belsky (1999).

Bara country boasts one of the prominent national park attractions known as Isalo. Madagascar, as a whole, exhibits a predominantly rice-cultivating culture, wherein the "tavy" technique (a method involving slash and burn) is widely prevalent. However, this method of cultivation contradicts conservation policies, prompting national authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and conservation groups to strive for its eradication. Unfortunately, during my stay in Madagascar, Isalo National Park was subjected to multiple instances of fire outbreaks. Some locals attributed these fires to farmers practicing tavy, while others suspected deliberate acts of sabotage against the national park. This scenario underscores a limitation of eco-tourism, as the implementation of prescribed models of practice with associated rules and regulations is often imposed by external entities. In a similar vein, the Makay region evokes similar sentiments among the local population, who aspire to conduct tourism on their own terms, thereby circumventing

official regulations and rules imposed by external entities that fail to consider the locals' customary way of life.

My encounter with Bara tourism offers valuable insights into the potential challenges inherent in the realm of eco-tourism. The Makay region serves as a vibrant living landscape where Bara customs and traditions are deeply ingrained throughout the year. It is noteworthy that the local inhabitants prefer to guide tourists along predetermined routes, occasionally refraining from conducting tours during specific months. During one instance, I became privy to a conversation among village elders that revolved around an upcoming tour organised by one of the few external agencies that facilitate tours in the Makay. In this particular case, the Beronono Bara community perceived their role as mere supervisors of the tour, lacking substantial authority or control over its execution. Despite the eventual occurrence of the tour, disagreements persisted regarding its overall coordination.

In contrast, when the Beronono Bara community itself embarked on trips to nearby towns such Ranohira to engage with tourists, they experienced a heightened sense of control over the entire tour itinerary. They were able to enforce regulations for tourists visiting the Makay, determine tour prices, and adapt the itinerary based on the group size, tailoring the experience to their discretion. While tours organised by agencies predominantly based in the capital city adhere to eco-tourism principles and involve the participation of the Beronono Bara, I observed that this dynamic engendered a palpable sense of discomfort and perceived loss of autonomy over their own lands. It appeared that the Bara people were not opposed to tourism per se; rather, they desired to assume leadership in managing and overseeing tourism activities. This led me to contemplate whether the Makay region would thrive as a destination if the Beronono Bara were to spearhead their own indigenous tourism enterprise, rather than succumbing to the emerging trend of eco-tourism in the area. I explore indigenous tourism as a concept in the following chapter.

3

Concepts

Within the existing anthropological literature on tourism, important conceptual elements emerge that strongly resonate with my firsthand encounters of tourism in Madagascar. These elements include the diverse expectations held by the local inhabitants, the national community and the outsiders/tourists; various narratives encompassing both local perspectives originating from the Bara themselves and national narratives shaped by historical and contemporary influences; and ultimately, the experiential dimension that defines the essence of the Makay tourism venture, both in terms of its internal dynamics and the offerings it presents to outsiders/tourists. By delving deeper into these elements, I gained a deeper understanding of the potential future trajectories for the Beronono Bara community. It revealed how these conceptual frameworks would play a significant role in shaping their aspirations for indigenous tourism enterprises and guide their navigation and design of tours based on these underlying principles.

Expectations, Narrative And Experience

According to Bruner (2005:23), the objective of a tourists is to embark on a quest for extraordinary experiences that will serve as captivating narratives, with the tourist assuming the role of the central character, thereby infusing the journey with personal significance. Such experiential endeavors are contingent upon a fundamental prerequisite: the presence of tourist expectations. The significance of tourism expectations in shaping the overall touristic encounter has been acknowledged by Skinner and Theodossopoulos (2011:3). As Pocock (1992:242) aptly asserts, we all embark on our journeys with hopeful anticipation, and it is precisely these expectations that serve as the impetus for undertaking travel in the first place. Devoid of tourism expectations, or at the very least preconceived notions regarding the offerings of a destination, the act of tourism would become an uncertain undertaking, particularly from the perspective of its hosts. It is through the lens of expectations that the clandestine allure and underlying logic of tourism, as an exemplification of an ideal modern life experience, can be unveiled (Skinner and Theodossopoulos 2011:2)

The phenomenon of travel inherently requires a narrative framework, as articulated by Bruner, which encompasses three distinct dimensions: life as lived, experienced, and told (ibid 19). Analysing ethnographic narratives presents a challenge as it necessitates unraveling the intricate interdependencies between these dimensions. It is widely acknowledged among theorists that narratives are indispensable vehicles for meaning-making, for without them the pursuit of meaning would be futile (J. Bruner 2003). In Edward Bruner's perspective, narratives not only serve as structures of meaning but also as structures of power (1986b:144). Within the realm of tourism,

narratives operate within a broader conceptual framework of metanarratives (2005:21), as noted by John Urry. Consequently, tourists are characterized by heightened expectations while being away from their habitual settings, and the tourism industry strives to fulfill and exceed these expectations throughout their journeys (1990:40)

The ultimate objective of a tour lies in the subsequent storytelling that ensues, thereby emphasizing the conscious consideration of post-tour narratives in the minds of tourists. Their intentions and actions in the present moment are shaped by the anticipation of recounting their experiences upon returning home (Bruner 2005:23). Fundamentally, the tour serves as a means to transform the abstract text or imaginative construct of the tourists pre-existing tale into an embodied narrative, an experiential reality (ibid:24) . in this context, Bruner argues that tourism, rather than inventing entirely new narratives, seeks out novel locations as platforms for the retelling of familiar stories that the tourist consumer is eager to engage with (22).

The tourists as Juergen Gnoth suggests, acts based on their "felt needs", which serve as the driving force behind the motivation-expectation process (1997:287). Thus, while on their journey, the tourist bridges the gap between their real self and ideal self. This "self-concept," as explained by Oliver (1980:460-1), acts as a reference point shaped by pre-existing expectations, subsequently influencing judgements and outcomes during the journey. Skinner and Theodossopoulos note that the desires of tourists are seldom fully satisfied, leading to a disillusionment of expectations, which then gives way to the anticipation of new desires, thus perpetuating the cycle of expectations and keeping it alive in the individual's mind (2011:2)

Is it possible that this ongoing cycle of unmet desires and renewed expectations serves as the underlying force that drives tourists to incessantly pursue novel experiences? Prior to their travels, tourists actively seek out improbable desires and expectations embedded within prevailing narratives, meticulously crafted and promoted by the tourism industry. Consequently, the failure to completely realize these desired outcomes prompts the cycle to restart, initiating a wholly fresh and distinctive experience. Salazar's insightful observation resonates in this context, as expectations not only shape the reality experienced by tourists but are also inherently generated by it (2016;6)

The fascinating aspect lies in the specific locations where these narratives intersect, which Bruner refers to as the touristic "borderzone," where local and global expectations harmoniously converge (2005:17). This concept of borderzone resonates with MacCannell's notion of an "empty meeting ground" (1992:2), a vibrant space brimming with people and endless possibilities, giving rise to new subjectivities and heightened consciousness, while also serving as a breeding ground for emergent

cultures and relationships. Similarly, Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space" (1994:2) emerges as an unconstructed and open arena that defies easy categorization, transcending fixed notions of ethnicity or cultural traits that are often associated with traditional frameworks. It is important to note that Mary Louise Pratt adopts a more critical perspective on the contact zone, perceiving it as a space laden with colonial encounters (1992:6). However it is essential to recognize that this perspective cannot be universally applied to all touristic borderzones

In Bruner's framework, the touristic borderzone takes on characteristics of a performative space, akin to an improvisational theatre where tourism unfolds on a stage carefully situated within this borderzone (Bruner 2005:18). This dynamic setting encourages a multifaced exploration of cultural encounters and facilitates the fluidity and spontaneity inherent in tourism experiences.

Allure lies in the untouched realm that awaits the Beronono Bara within the pristine wilderness of the Makay. As outsiders embark on their explorations of this environment, a fascinating transformation begins to take shape, driven by the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and feedback between locals and visitors. This continuous interplay forms a dynamic loop, giving rise to what Salazar aptly terms "imaginaries" about the Makay. Over time, as touristic encounters occur repeatedly within this captivating "borderzone" or, more fittingly, "empty meeting grounds," a potent fusion of local metanarratives and tourism experiences could potentially cultivate a reinvigorated Bara identity deeply rooted in the environment.

In "The Crossing." My dedicated endeavor is to encapsulate the essence of individuals who have left a lasting impression and have been instrumental in conveying these profound concepts. As Bruner astutely suggests, to truly grasp the essence of the tourist, one must begin with their personal story. Consequently, my ethnographic exploration delves not only into the perspectives of the local community but also amplifies the voices of the outsiders and tourists. Through this layered approach, a complex tapestry of expectations emerges at both collective and individual levels, giving rise to a multitude of narratives within the realm of tourism.

Delving deeper into questions of authenticity, traditions, customs, and heritage unravels a fascinating complexity, as the narrative becomes intertwined with the unique experiences and perspectives of each individual. Seeking a common thread between the questions posed and the diverse array of responses becomes a challenging yet compelling endeavor. It is my earnest aspiration that through "The Crossing," I can navigate this intricate terrain with clarity, capturing the intricate interplay between personal stories, collective narratives, and the ever-evolving landscape of tourism.

Authenticity

The concept of authenticity in the realm of tourism is a captivating and intricate subject that has garnered significant attention from researchers across disciplines. The multifaceted nature of authenticity has led various anthropologists to explore its subjective essence and the profound implications for both tourists and the destinations they visit. By examining the works of various anthropologists who have theorized and offered perspectives on authenticity, we navigate the complex landscape of authenticity in tourism, shedding light on the tension between imagined expectations and the realities encountered by travelers.

Salazar's (2010) notion of the "World of Imaginaries" becomes relevant, as our imagination plays a pivotal role in shaping our wants, desires, expectations, and ultimately, our perceptions. Salazar argues that many of our imaginaries are structured by dichotomies that construct the world through paradigmatically linked binominals, such as nature-culture, here-there, and male-female (7). Through examples from Yogyakarta, Indonesia and Arusha, Tanzania, Salazar demonstrates how lived worlds are increasingly shaped by fantasies and fabrications that must be imagined before they can be actualised (8). This is akin to what Thoden van Velzen highlights about the individuals capacity to generate imagination as the primary driving force, while the larger socio-political and economic contexts contribute as secondary factors in the production of societal fantasies (1985:108).

Furthermore, drawing from Dickens' tale of Pip, we recognize the deeply rooted connection between thought, desire, and society's capitalist-driven reproduction of expectations (Skinner and Theodossopoulos 2011:1). This interplay of imagination and expectation, both real and perceived, fuels the question for conquest, whether visual or embodied (Young 1995; Campbell 1987). Hence, it can be contended that the relentless quest for authenticity finds its roots in the cognitive realm of the individual traveler, as they traverse the multifaceted terrain of tourism.

Selwyn highlights the tendency for premodern and precommoditized destinations to be perceived as inherently socially authentic (1996:21), suggesting that the allure of authenticity stems from a yearning for an alternative to the superficiality of modern society (Bossevain 1996:2) Despite the allure of authenticity, the alignment between tourists' imagined expectations and actual reality they encounter often proves to be precarious. Bruner's (1991) observation that tourists tend to seek experiences that reinforce their preconceived notions highlights the subjectivity inherent in the quest for authenticity. Crick (1989) and Adams (1984) extend this perspective, asserting that authenticity is constructed through the lens of popular stereotypes and personal reference points, rather than

relying on objective historical or ethnographic facts. This realisation prompts critical inquiry into the interplay between individual perceptions and the shaping of authenticity.

The quest for authenticity in the tourism encounter is further muddled by the notion of "pseudo events" put forth by Boorstin (1964), shedding light on the shaping of tourist encounters, where tourists selectively perceive and engage with their surroundings based on their desired experiences rather than an objective reality. MacCannell's (1976) following Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach sets forth the distinction between the front stage, which represents the manufactured cultural performance for tourists, and the back stage, which symbolizes the more authentic and privately experienced local culture, underscores the idea of staged authenticity. It is noteworthy that tourist industries have recognized this dichotomy and actively create orchestrated back stage front stages (Leite and Graburn, 2009). MacCannell argues that tourists seek the back region to forge a sense of unity with their hosts, hoping to access a more genuine and intimate experience (1976).

Cohen (1979, 1988) takes a different stance, asserting that authenticity ultimately resides within the minds of tourists themselves. Different individuals exhibit varying degrees of alienation and motivations when seeking authenticity, with some content with experiencing novelty before returning home, while others strive to adopt an authentic lifestyle permanently. This highlights the subjective nature of authenticity and the role of individual perceptions and aspirations in shaping the quest for genuine experiences.

Within the realm of the anthropology of tourism, the pursuit of authenticity among travellers is often regarded as a quest for 'the real truth' – an endeavour that unveils a deeper understanding of the world. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is not always the case. In the forthcoming chapter of this thesis, I will delve into fascinating examples of post-tourists in Madagascar, a group of travellers who eschew boasting about pre-packaged excursions and contrived activities. One such individual, Augustine with whom I shared a coach ride, exemplifies their perspective. For Augustine, authenticity resided in the immersive experience of living alongside local communities, observing their way of life without imposing his presence. His aim was to unearth the spiritual essence inherent in the people he encountered, comprehending their unique outlook on existence, and utlising this insight as a catalyst for personal growth and self-reflection. In essence, Augustine believed that authenticty could be found by engaging with the tangible reality that surrounded him, while remaining receptive to the wisdom embedded in local customs and practices. Through this thesis, I aim to intricately explore and complicate our

understanding of post-tourists' expectations, shedding new light on the complex dynamics of their quest for authenticity.

According to Bruner (2205:3), a critical analysis of cultural performances necessitates the deconstruction of their presentation in order to discern the specific form they have taken in relation to their original or alternative versions, thus illuminating their construction for tourism. Specifically focusing on Balinese dances, Bruner asserts that there is no existence of a simulacrum, as there is no definitive original. Instead, performances tailored for tourists emerge from the cultural matrix, embodying novely within the contextual framework of the audience and the prevailing times (5; Bruner 1984; 1986a). In essence, Bruner argues that cultural transformations are intrinsic to all societies, yet all the Blinese dances remain quintessetially 'Balinese' in nature.

Until now, our examination has primarily centred on the manifestion of authenticy within destinations visited by outsiders. However, an essential aspect that warrants onsideration is the authenticity of the outsiders themselves in their pursuit of personal expectations and desires. It is important to acknowledge that raising this inquiry unveils an additional dimension of exploration in our ongoing quest for authenticity.

Alma Gottlieb (1982) sheds light on the phenomenon of class inversion in tourism, wherein working-class individuals on tours asprire to emulate the lifestyle of the affluent, while the upper classes seem more humble and traditional experiences. Consequently, the concept of authenticity becomes enigmative, as the question of what and who embodies authenticity becomes blurred. Boissevain further highlights the transient nature of tourism and the unequal power dynamics between tourists and locals, which may contribute to an experience characterised by locals exploiting and deceiving tourists, while tourists may exhibit disdain and mistreatment toward locals due to their social status and position (ed 1996:4).

In this context, the notion of post-tourists becomes relevant. Post-tourists are individuals who embrace the understanding that there is no singular authentic tourist experience and instead appreciate the journey itself (Urry 1990:11; Cohen 1979/1998; Leite and Graburn 2009:43). Post-tourists do not necessarily anticipate encountering untouched aspects of life, but rather possess a preparedness to navigate discrepencies and blurred boundaries (Franklin 2003).

Considering the intricate and nuanced nature of authenticiy, it becomes evident that its understanding extends beyond mere experiential encounters and fleeting moments in the realm of tourism. The very essence of authenticy, its definition and determination, stands poised on uncertain ground, raising

profound questions as to its true nature and the criteria by which it is ascribed. Engaging in this discourse, Bruner presents a captivating perspective that demands careful consideration: the notion of authenticity should be approached with circumspection, for it emerges as a potentially deceptive concept, particularly when employed by tourists, locals, or individuals intertwined within the intricate fabric of tourism industy (2005:5). With the myriad of views regarding authenticity, we are enticed to embark on a profound exploration of authenticity, where we dare to question our preconceptions and embark on a journey towards a more profound comprehension of its enigmatic essence.

Bruner's thought-provoking exploration of authenticity challenges conventional notions. When asked about authenticity, the Bara would consider it a non-question, preferring to define themselves through their distinctive practices and beliefs. For instance, their adherence to the Fomban-draza ancestral customs embodies their Bara identity. However, the younger generation, influenced by external forces such as tourism and technological advancements, risk losing this connection. Nevertheless, their evolving cultural expressions to not diminish their Bara essence.

Another Bara tradition, the Malaso, centred around the revered Zebu cattle, exemplifies this dynamic nature. While the contemporary Malaso practice has shifted from a mere test of virility to a perilous pursuit driven by economic motives, its authenticity lies in the enduring pursuit of stealing Zebu, a quintessential Bara goal. Bruner's perspective aligns with the notion that cultures are in a constant state of flux, rendering a fixed concept of authenticity elusive. Nonetheless, it does not negate the possibility of encountering authentic Bara experiences within these cultural transformations.

Indigenous Tourism

The advent of tourism among the Beronono Bara community brings forth significant considerations and potential consequences. The presence of outsiders in the pristine landscapes of the Makay region may trigger unforeseen changes, both in the local interactions of the Beronono Bara with their environment and in how outsiders perceive and engage with it. Despite the initial impetus driven by tourists agencies from the capital city and local NGOs, promoting eco-tourism as a means to explore the Makay, the Beronono Bara themselves display a more reserved attitude towards adopting this

practice. Their deep awareness of the unexplored realm beyond their doorstep, an environment ripe with untapped adventures and experiences, instills a sense of responsibility for their ancestral lands.

Indeed, these lands possess the potential not only to redefine and reconstitute their local identity but also to have broader national implications, as the emerging Makay tourism enterprise could position it as a prominent destination promoted by national tour agencies to the global community. However, a critical question remains unanswered: Will the the Beronono Bara be willing to surrender the Makay to conform to conventional eco-tourism models. Or will they courageously embark on a pioneering path as advocates of indigenous tourism in the Makay? The case for indigenous tourism has garnered increasing attention in various disciplinary spheres, emphasizing the urgent need for its implementation in recent years. As such, the Beronono Bara find themselves at a crossroads, contemplating the potential of their ancestral lands and the pivotal role they could play in shaping a more inclusive and sustainable tourism paradigm.

Emerging from a paradigm that perpetuates the dichotomy of opportunity and exclusion, indigenous tourism becomes enmeshed within the framework of consumption and appropriation, as indigenous peoples are often compelled by necessity to participate in an industry that commodifies their differences (Bunten and Graburn 2018:1). Extant research in the field of indigenous tourism predominantly focuses on best practices within the business model, examining economic development aspects (Butler and Hinch 2007, Ryan and Huyton 2002). However, scant attention has been given to the nuanced issues of politics, identity, and representation that extend beyond the economic dimension of indigenous tourism.

Bunten (2010) characterizes the prevailing model of indigenous tourism as a “cultural tourism formula,” which offers indigenous peoples a rudimentary framework to assert control over their own representation. Nevertheless, this model is inherently designed to cater to the desires of tourists and is intricately entwined with the capitalist commercial system that underpins the tourism enterprises. The focus on economic development in indigenous tourism research has overshaded critical examinations of the political implications, cultural identity dynamics and power structures inherent within this complex phenomenon.

The inherent limitation of the basic tourism model, similar to other manifestations of ecotourism, lies in its tendency to merely superficially alter the existing system (Duffy 2010:99). Despite its claims to foster developmental advantages for Indigenous communities, it ultimately operates within a broader framework that hampers their progress and obstructs their ability to meaningfully participate in local, national, and global economic processes. An illustrative case can be found in the San Peoples, who

may nominally hold the reins of their tourism enterprise but find themselves subjected to the directives of five consultants and two expatriates, dictating how they should navigate their own venture (Thomas 2000).

Moreover, benign terms such as “development” and “sustainability” may create an illusion of consent and progress, yet Indigenous peoples articulate how these concepts conceal a systematic progression of industry-driven genocide, dismissing their own firsthand accounts of colonization (Johnston 2007:61)

The imperative for expanded research in the realm of Indigenous tourism, particularly concerning politics, identity, and representation, arises from the geographical reality that a sizable portion of ecotourism destinations are situated within secluded Indigenous territories. Within these territories, Indigenous peoples have diligently safeguarded rich ecological and biodiversity resources through their refined knowledge systems cultivated over countless generations (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1999). This preservation is deeply intertwined with their profound connection to the land, which Indigenous leaders often liken to a pivotal fulcrum that embodies their responsibility and custodianship. However, this responsibility faces formidable challenges posed by the voracious appetite of our global consumer class, with tourism emerging as yet another manifestation of our insatiable consumerist desires (Ereira 2001; Davies 2004). Thus, a comprehensive exploration of the politics, identity and representation of Indigenous peoples in the context of tourism is crucial for comprehending the complex interplay between cultural preservation, economic forces, and the environmental implications of our modern consumer-driven society.

Indigenous tourism unfolds as a vibrant realm of representational transformations, offering Indigenous communities an unprecedented avenue to extend their reach to the global stage and forge new alliances and supportive connections (Dimitrios Theodossopoulos 2018:99; see also Strathern and Steward 2009; Theodossopoulos 2010). Within the domain of Indigenous tourism, a captivating dynamic emerges, enabling the circumvention of disparities and disjunctures inherent to the peripheral status and marginalized representation often faced by Indigenous groups (Appadurai 1996). By focusing on Indigenous tourism, a profound potential arises to inspire transformative changes within host societies, revitalizing local traditions, economies, and employment opportunities, while simultaneously reconstituting, reasserting, and negotiating notions of authenticity (Theodossopoulos 2018:100; see also Franklin 2003; Graburn 1976; leite and Graburn 2009; Salazar 2010; Selwyn 1996; Skinner and Theodossopoulos 2011; Smith 1989).

It is within this dynamic and exhilarating realm that the transformative power of Indigenous tourism shines, propelling Indigenous communities towards a reimagined future of cultural resurgence, economic empowerment, and heightened visibility on the global stage.

4

THE CROSSING

“Unveiling Professor X”

An intrepid knowledge explorer, Professor X has embarked on fieldwork expeditions across the Pacific Islands, Europe, and South America. His insatiable curiosity revolves around unravelling the structure and representation of indigenous knowledge, the intricate interplay between ideas and their material contexts, and the art of crafting ethnographic works.

Intriguingly, his fascination with indigenous knowledge and the convergence of ideas and materiality provided me with a golden opportunity to delve into the rich worldview of the Bara people. What set Professor X apart was his affinity for "graphic ethnography," a novel approach that breathed new life into traditional ethnographic practices through illustrative analysis. With his open-mindedness, I could explore unconventional ways of expressing and presenting ethnography.

From his vast cultural and social analysis expertise, Professor X offered me a compass to navigate my intellectual journey. With his guidance and mentorship, I would be free to uncover my central focus, allowing my research to flourish in creative and uncharted directions.

Professor X's colourful background and innovative approach promised an exhilarating adventure as I set forth on a captivating expedition of cultural exploration.

1 "You're an Anthropologist; you do not realise it yet!"

In the charming town of Canterbury, there was a café theatre called Gulbelkin, nestled on a campus. Our usual meeting spot was where a peculiar ritual unfolded each time. He would unexpectedly appear in my line of sight, promptly change seats, and repeat this pattern. Over time, our encounters became more adventurous, but that is a story for later. Let us not get ahead of ourselves.

After exchanging pleasantries, the conversation naturally turned to the topic at hand. "There is something special about the Gulbelkin," I mused. He responded with a knowing look accompanied by a bemused smile. I have come to call this expression his "what are you on about" stare. I tried to delay discussing the project, but it was inevitable.

"So, tell me about your project," he inquired. "It is about Madagascar," I replied. "Yes, I'm aware. I read your proposal," he admitted, still maintaining a touch of naivety. "What approach are you proposing? Do you have an idea about the people you will be interacting with? Have you been to

Madagascar before? You mentioned a French team in your proposal that conducted preliminary studies on cave paintings. What is the current status of their work?" If I could describe my expression in that moment, it would have been a small victory, but I cannot.

"I am an archaeologist, and most of my studies have revolved around archaeology. I am not well-versed in anthropology," I confessed, avoiding eye contact. We both stared into the distance, avoiding each other's gaze. "You will learn. It is not that difficult, especially with your previous experiences. You will adapt your thinking to incorporate appropriate anthropological approaches. Now, tell me what you have in mind."

As it turned out, I already had some knowledge. "Well, I would like to explore the relationship between the cave paintings and the people who consider them a part of their heritage," I began after a brief hesitation. "I aim to survey and document all the paintings, creating a comprehensive understanding of the local people's worldview and how the cave paintings fit into it. I want to delve into how they interact with the caves and the paintings themselves, as well as uncover any important traditional or current customs associated with the cave art. Additionally, I would like to explore the territory, map out more cave sites, and determine if there is a relationship between their strategic and environmental preferences for the locations of these paintings. That is all I have for now."

That was my typical archaeological jargon. Professor X said, "I want to hear more about the local people and less about the site." He pulled out his tablet and started jotting down notes. I remained attentive. "You should consider teaching the introductory course on Social Anthropology. It will provide a solid foundation for exploring your ideas, using existing concepts and theories to guide you," he suggested. I gladly accepted the offer. I needed to strengthen and develop my anthropological perspective, making it a counterpart to my archaeological viewpoint. Professor X leisurely rose and headed outside, cigarette in hand. "Are you coming?" he asked, inviting me to join him.

“Unveiling the Secrets: How Cave Mahatigny Transformed My Path”

The crack of dawn held a special allure in the village. As the first rays of sunlight pierced the sky, I stepped outside to embrace the world awakening. The air carried a specific heat, a tangible reminder of the arid highlands.

My host skillfully weaved intricate baskets in the courtyard, while her sister sat by her side, crafting delicate rice mats. A man nearby tirelessly hammered nails into his thatched roof, his ceaseless energy

leaving me wondering if sleep ever graced his weary eyes. Chickens and ducks, like a synchronized ensemble, roamed the grounds, pecking at scattered grains of rice. It was 6:10 a.m., a moment frozen in my memory.

My daily ritual commenced as I joined Apollo in conversation with Alfred, the esteemed head of the Makay Association. Coffee and a cigarette served as my humble breakfast, fueling my anticipation for the day ahead. Greetings exchanged between us were simple nods and warm smiles, accompanied by their playful remark, "Ah, Kadi Vazaha, you are awake now."

I turned my gaze towards the majestic mountain range that painted the horizon, a sight that never failed to evoke sheer delight within me. This was the day I had been waiting for—the day Cave Mahatigny would become the genesis of my PhD fieldwork experiences.

To borrow the words of Georges Bataille in his work *Lascaux, or the Birth of Art* (1955), this expedition marked my personal "Cave Mahatigny," the birthplace of my academic pursuit. The weight of anticipation mingled with the electrifying sense of discovery, igniting a fire within my soul.

Little did I know that this cave, shrouded in mystery and ancient wisdom, would hold the key to unlocking the narratives of a vibrant community. With each step, I inhaled the essence of the land, ready to embark on an ethnographic adventure that would forever transform my understanding of this remarkable land.

“Unleashing the Imagination: Into the Depths of the Cave”

Perusing tourist brochures and pamphlets ignites a spark of inspiration, stirring the senses and fueling our inner drive. However, my search proved elusive when it came to finding descriptions of the awe-inspiring Makay Massif and its mysterious caves. This untouched gem of Madagascar remained an uncharted territory for tourism and academic literature. However, snippets from Madagascar's other renowned and widely publicised sites added tantalising flavour to my imagination of the Makay's hidden wonders.

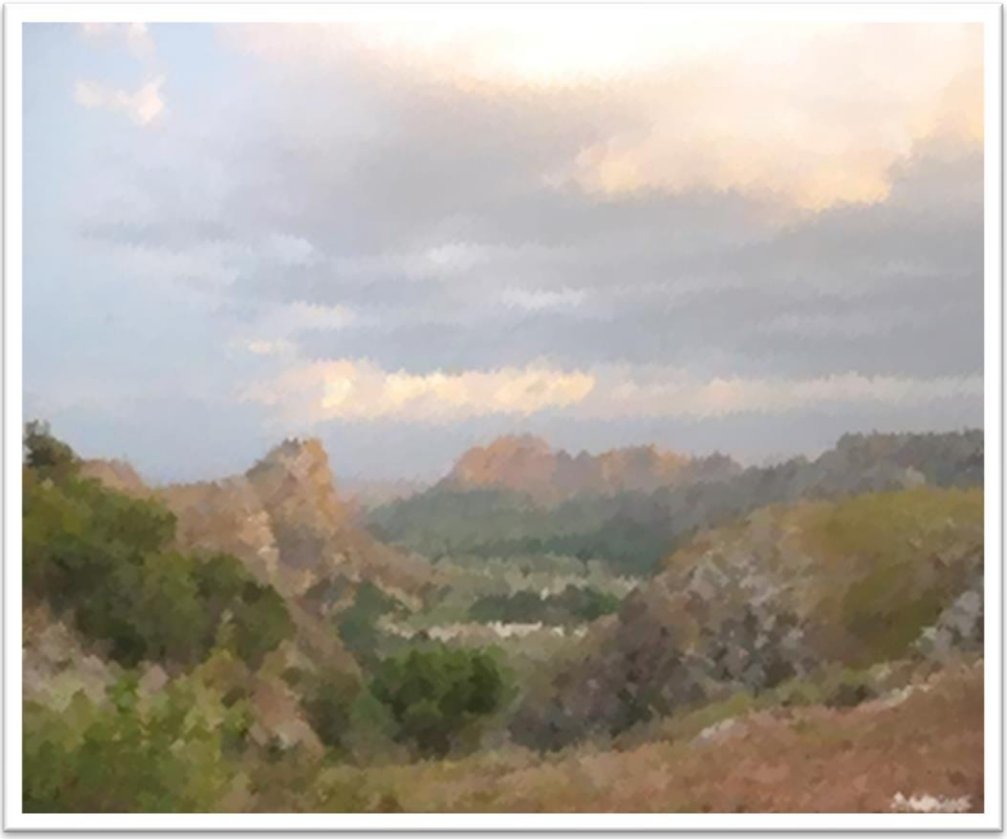
Approaching the same material from an academic standpoint opened a gateway to a whole new realm of exploration.

Situated between Beroroha in the south and Malaimbandy in the north, the Makay Massif spans approximately 400,000 hectares, rising and falling between 200 and 1,000 meters (NAP, 2015)

Imagine a majestic canopy, now collapsed, giving birth to an imposing embankment. Behind this natural fortress, two cavernous rooms emerge, intersecting at a perfect 90-degree angle. Welcome to the mesmerising realm of Cave Mahatigny.

Within its ancient walls, a visual feast awaits. Nearly 800 vibrant and polychromatic paintings grace the hallowed space, as documented by Erik Gonthier in 2010. However, that is not all. Buried within other caves explored by the intrepid French archaeological team in separate expeditions from 2010 to 2011, a trove of funerary remains and burial objects came to light. This discovery stirred an intriguing realisation: These caves held far greater significance than previously imagined.

As interpretative archaeologists suggest, the paintings within Cave Mahatigny transcend mere decoration. They imbue the space with an aura of ritual and sacrality, shaping the experiences and worldviews of those who encounter them. In the words of Renfew and Bahn (2008:403), "the landscape structures the experience and the world view of that individual." With its paintings, this cave becomes a narrative landscape where memories are etched into the fabric of the community's history.



Contemplating the profound words of Mircia Eliade, we realise that to dwell in a world, we must establish it (1965:22.) Cave Mahatigny, with its captivating paintings and ancient echoes, forms the very foundation of a mesmerising realm.

“Unlocking the Hidden Narratives: Beyond Tourist Brochures”

As I delved into the official tourist agency accounts, the Makay Massif emerged as an untouched wilderness, brimming with unexplored wonders. However, a glaring omission caught my attention—the absence of any mention of the vibrant community that calls this region home, with its rich cultural heritage. Intriguingly, I stumbled upon some thought-provoking commentary pieces that shed light on this disparity.

Lonely Planet, renowned for its travel insights, captivated me by describing the Makay Massif as an "otherworldly sandstone massif...riven with verdant canyons, dramatic ridges, and high plateaux." Their vivid portrayal of the landscape, with its weaving rock formations resembling lava fingers

adorned with lush green shadows, ignited a curiosity that resonated deeply within me (Lonelyplanet, 2016:79).

Surprisingly, TripAdvisor, a go-to resource for many travellers, had nothing to offer about the Makay Massif. Lonely Planet's enchanting depiction fueled the intrigue of adventurers and backpackers like myself.

In search of more information, I ventured into the tourist office in the capital city. Leaflets and brochures beckoned, but disappointingly, they provided limited insight into cave sites or the Makay Massif. Instead, staff members directed me to Isalo National Park, a popular destination for tourists in the Bara region, conveniently located on the RN7 highway.

A striking contrast unfolded before me as I observed the concise packaging of information for tourists. Tour companies like Rainbowtours and Imaginetravel tantalised potential visitors with snippets of what to expect. Rainbowtours emphasised the enchanting mix of walking trails, endemic plants, Bara culture, and unique wildlife. At the same time, Imaginetravel painted a picture of blissful relaxation, highlighting natural swimming pools nestled amidst picturesque palm-fringed settings (Rainbowtours, Imaginetravel).

A new perspective began to crystallise by browsing through these travel descriptions and comparing them to the denser and more academic archaeological and anthropological material. I realised that the true essence of both worlds—the narrative I sought—would be revealed in the field. The Bara people would become the storytellers, unveiling their identity, humanity, and deep connection to this land through cave paintings.

The realm of possibilities opened up before me, capturing the intertwining realities of the tourism industry and the authentic narratives waiting to be discovered. The journey ahead promised an immersive exploration of the past and present, where the vivid strokes of ancient art would reveal the soul of the Bara community and their profound presence in this fascinating place.

"Kadi, time to embark!" Apollo's urgency shattered my breakfast reverie, urging me into action. Reluctantly, I set aside my lingering thoughts and embraced the inevitable adventure that awaited.

“A Vazaha's journey into Bara country: encounters and reflections”

Every morning, my trek to Sey's house through the untamed beauty of the Makay River was a delightful adventure. Along the way, I would attempt to climb mango trees, much to the amusement of the Bara people, who observed my failed attempts with joyous smiles. Little did I know that the secret to harvesting mangoes was throwing sticks and stones until the ripe ones fell to the ground—a lesson waiting to be shared.

Upon reaching Sey's village, I often found the chariot cart parked nearby, but the Zebu, the prized cattle of the Bara, were nowhere in sight. On one occasion, an older man sat atop a rice mat, seemingly possessed by a Malagasy spirit. His nervous tremors and incomprehensible mutterings made me uneasy as if caught in the eye of a storm. Sey, a man of my height with a lean and muscular frame, emerged from his house, reassuring me that he was merely a local drunkard who travelled from village to village, regaling the highlanders with his tales in exchange for a taste of locally distilled rum. In my mind, I could not help but connect his wanderings to Marcel Mauss's concept of "The Gift," pondering the intricate social dynamics at play.

Carrying my trusty notebooks, filtered straw, and a few mangoes if luck was on my side, I would join Apollo and Sey as they prepared a lunch of rice and dried fish. Sey's children would stand in awe, their gaze piercing through me. It was a gaze saturated with the essence of the "Tourist Gaze" described in anthropological literature—an eerie yet innocent curiosity that revealed itself through their silent but intense stares. The youngest child regarded me as the great Vazaha devil. I would playfully tease him by taking sudden steps in his direction, causing him to flee back into the safety of his house, far from the mischievous outsider.

"It is hot," I remarked, stating the obvious. Apollo chuckled and responded, "You are not the first person to notice that." Indeed, the scorching heat was a challenge, unlike anything I had experienced back in England. The uninhabited vastness, the striking geological formations, the scent of fresh air, the presence of wild Zebu, and the symphony of birdsong that filled the air—everything was a stark departure from the urban landscape I was accustomed to. I jokingly mentioned the absence of mango trees.

Apollo and Sey would converse in Malagasy, often discussing family matters and village affairs. Their interactions were filled with shared smiles and occasional playful shoves, evoking a sense of nostalgia and camaraderie. As an outsider, I found comfort in their reminiscing, gradually immersing myself in the rhythm of their banter. "So, Kadi, do you need to rest or are you good?" Apollo teased, knowing full well that our journey had barely begun. "It's only been five minutes. Sey, I can still see your hut in the distance," I replied, determined to keep up with their pace. Sey chuckled, reminding me that when Vazaha (foreigners) visit, they often take their time, absorbing every detail. He humorously suggested that one mango tree was much like the next, implying that the novelty eventually wanes.

My initial hesitation lingered as I pondered Sey's constant use of "Vazaha" to address me. Determined to challenge this classification, I mustered the courage to confront him. "Why do you keep referring to me as a Vazaha? We established that I am just Kadi," I questioned, seeking to unveil the layers behind this distinction. To my surprise, Sey responded with a warm smile while Apollo placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder. "He is only teasing, my friend. We Bara folk also have a flair for sarcasm, " Apollo said, reminding me that humour transcends cultural boundaries.

As our journey continued, we found ourselves amid the low season, when the water receded from the myriad of rivers merging with the mighty Makay River. This retreat exposed a mesmerizing landscape of glowing yellow sand. Once flowing with currents left behind a tapestry of dry riverbeds that we traversed on our way to our respective destinations. These short pathways served as a testament to the ever-changing nature of the Makay region, where even the rivers seemed to dance to the rhythm of the seasons.

During these crossings, we often discovered hidden gems—a small stream nestled not far from the dry beds, offering respite and becoming our impromptu camping site. The tranquil flow of water whispered stories of life's persistence, mirroring the fluidity of our journey and the interconnectedness of the land and its inhabitants. In the embrace of nature's oasis, Sey, Apollo, and I would rest and rejuvenate here, immersing ourselves in the essence of the Bara landscape.

The boundaries between the insider and outsider began to blur in these fleeting moments. The banter and camaraderie shared between Sey and Apollo revealed a cultural depth that extended beyond surface-level encounters. Their playful interactions, tinged with nostalgia, unveiled the enduring spirit of the Bara people—a spirit rooted in community, storytelling, and shared experiences. As I allowed myself to be enveloped in their world, I came to appreciate the rich tapestry of their sarcasm, humour, and the unspoken language transcending mere words.

The Makay River and the glowing sands became more than physical features; they transformed into symbols of the fluidity of cultural boundaries and the interconnectedness of human experiences. In this vast and ever-changing landscape, where water and sand danced in harmony, I learned to embrace the playful nuances of Bara culture, allowing them to illuminate my encounters and bridge the gap between the Vazaha and the Bara, fostering a deeper understanding and connection that transcended labels and stereotypes.

"Navigating the Shifting Self: Reflections on Identity and Movement"

Amid our journey, a wave of introspection washed over me, compelling me to contemplate my place among Sey, Apollo, and the Bara people. It was a moment of profound self-reflection as I grappled with the complexities of my role as a researcher in this vibrant community. I yearned to transcend the label of "Vazaha" and be seen simply as Kadi—a fellow human being connected by shared experiences.

With a deep-rooted desire to shed the privileges that accompanied my Vazaha status, I sought to present myself as more than a tourist. I longed to demonstrate a purpose beyond mere sightseeing, hoping that my presence would be perceived as a genuine pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Yet, the weight of my outsider status persisted, permeating my interactions and shaping the lens through which I was perceived. It was a continuous struggle, an internal dialogue that unfolded as Sey and Apollo engaged in animated Malagasy conversations, leaving me to wrestle with my thoughts and lag behind.

In this moment of contemplation, I found solace in the insights of Amitav Ghosh and his concept of "Dwelling in Travel." Ghosh challenged the notion that fieldwork is a localized experience, emphasizing instead that it is an intricate web of encounters, an endless journey that spans centuries. Dwelling, understood as the foundation of collective life, is complemented by travel, an extra element that enriches our understanding of cultural meanings (Clifford 1997:3). As I delved deeper into this concept, I recognized that movement is a

catalyst for personal growth and transformation. The act of traversing physical and metaphorical landscapes has the power to reshape perspectives, illuminating new realities and fostering profound connections.

The parallels between the roles of anthropologist and tourist emerged from my contemplation. Sidney Mintz's (1977;59) assertion that "we are all tourists" resonated deeply, forcing me to confront the inherent privilege and potential pitfalls that come with my anthropological pursuits. Anthropologists, like tourists, occupy a unique position that can unsettle the researcher and the local community. As Burns (2004) articulates, this recognition has often been met with a need for more sociocultural awareness within the field, where the focus has primarily been on economics and the tourists themselves rather than the intricate dynamics of the host community.

I grappled with this juxtaposition and my desire to be seen as Kadi while acknowledging the inherent perception of being a Vazaha. Embracing Amitav Ghosh's concept of dwelling in travel provided solace, as it allowed me to find a home in other cultures, enabling critical dialogues and fostering a deeper understanding of the diverse tapestry of human existence. I no longer resisted the Vazaha label but sought to coexist with it, recognizing its instinctive usage within the community. My focus shifted towards the fluidity of movement, acknowledging its capacity to shape perspectives and create new realities. As I mulled over these notions, I was reminded of Robin Williams' iconic scene in "Dead Poets Society," where standing on a table in a classroom could fundamentally alter one's perception of reality.

I began to find equilibrium in this liminal space between Vazaha and Kadi. I embraced the inherent complexities of my position, understanding that movement was crucial for forging connections and gaining unique perspectives. Through this introspective journey, I learned to navigate the shifting tides of identity, carving a path that allowed for authentic engagement, profound insights, and the cherished connections I forged with Sey, Apollo, and the Bara people.

Lost in the labyrinth of my musings, I suddenly found myself abruptly awakened from my reverie by Sey's puzzled voice. "Kadi, what are you doing? Why do you stand there, gazing at the tree as if transfixed?" Startled, I realized that while my mind had been traversing realms of contemplation, my physical body had remained stationary, suspended in the ethereal thought space. My yearning for movement had been momentarily forgotten, as I stood motionless amidst the shifting sands.

With a gentle jolt, I stirred from my mental slumber, sensing the urgency to catch up with Sey and Apollo. Lightly jogging through the arduous terrain, each step a struggle against the resistance of the sand, I sought to bridge the gap that my absent-mindedness had created. "Sorry," I uttered breathlessly, trying to regain my composure. "I was lost in a daydream within the labyrinth of my thoughts."

Sey, his shoulders sagging in a gesture of exasperation, continued his path, muttering the word "Vazaha" under his breath. I could not help but feel the weight of my presence, a perpetual reminder of my otherness, threatening to drive them to the brink of frustration. Apollo, casting a lingering gaze upon me, as if attempting to decipher the enigma I presented, proceeded forward without a word. It seemed that I had become a puzzle they yearned to solve, an enigmatic presence that perpetually disrupted the flow of their lives.

In the cacophony of their silent exasperation, I realized that I had become a source of fascination and, perhaps, annoyance. My attempts to bridge the gap, to be seen as more than just a Vazaha, falter with each misstep. The dance between my pensive self and the lived reality of Sey, Apollo, and the Bara people became increasingly intricate, a delicate choreography fraught with uncertainties and missteps.

As the sands beneath my feet continued to shift, mirroring the tumult within my mind, I grappled with the dissonance between my internal wanderings and the groundedness demanded by the physical world. It was a constant struggle between the realms of imagination and the necessity of presence. Each interaction reminded me of my perpetual status as an outsider, a Vazaha whose presence elicited curiosity and frustration.

However, despite the lingering unease, I could not help but marvel at the intricate tapestry woven by our encounters. However fraught with challenges, the interplay of our distinct perspectives held the promise of profound insights and transformative growth. I remained determined to bridge the gaps, navigate the labyrinth of cultural differences, and forge connections that transcended the labels and limitations imposed by the Vazaha status.

Thus, with each step forward, I endeavoured to engage with both worlds—the internal and the external—seeking harmony amidst the dissonance, understanding that the dance of dreams interrupted was an integral part of the rich tapestry of ethnographic exploration.

2 "You're an Anthropologist; you do not realise it yet!"

"What do you know about rock art? As the question hung in the air, swirling around me like tendrils of smoke from my languidly lit cigarette, I felt the weight of my limited expertise on the Bara cave paintings. My nerves, subtly betrayed by the scent, were not lost on him. It was evident in the discerning glimmer within his eyes.

Summoning my courage, I ventured into an explanation, drawing upon the teachings of David Lewis Williams and the shamanistic dimension of South African cave paintings. "In my pursuit, I aim to explore the metaphysical aspects of Bara rock art," I began. "While acknowledging the agency of art in Anthropology, Lewis Williams' work on Shaman paintings in South African caves has captivated my attention."

The realm of Southern African rock art, I continued, stands as one of the most comprehensively understood, thanks in part to the detailed ethnographic accounts of the San people during the 19th and 20th centuries. The meticulous research conducted by J.M. Orpen and Wilhelm Bleek has provided invaluable insights (Lewis-Williams, J. David, 1981). Furthermore, the extensive neuropsychological research focused on the San Kalahari desert people has served as a fertile ground for examining Palaeolithic art (Ibid).

This rich tapestry of knowledge allows us to approach the fundamental question: "To what extent can San rock art be elucidated in terms of shamanistic beliefs?" As revealed by the ethnohistorical records of the 1870s and the twentieth-century Kalahari San ethnography, the continuum of specific beliefs and rituals underscores the enduring resonance of certain mythological narratives across time and space (Lewis-Williams, J.D., 1998).

Citing Dr. Eric Gonthier of the Musee de L'Homme (MDH) in Paris, who conducted preliminary research in 2010 and 2011 in the Bara village of Beronono, I shared the revelation that the Bara people attributed the creation of these paintings to the Ombiassi, the esteemed shamans in Malagasy culture. Intriguingly, while the practice of painting in the caves ceased decades ago, remnants of this artistic legacy now find expression on paper. I learned that some children in the village occasionally venture

to the caves to practice their drawings, and rudimentary depictions adorn the walls of certain village homes, as observed by Odile Romain of MDH.

"My intent," I confided to Professor X, "is to investigate the ongoing relationship between the local community and these enigmatic caves. However, it is worth noting that during their visit, the French team was only granted access to a few caves. Eric mentioned that he was permitted to see the revered Faratsay cave, held in high regard by the Bara as a site of great sanctity. Only a few know the route leading to this sacred cavern."

Professor X remained unconvinced, cautioning me about the extensive knowledge required concerning the Bara's divination practices. "To truly understand the connection between the Rock Art and their divination, you would likely need years, if not decades, of apprenticeship under a shaman. It will not be an easy journey," he warned. The mixture of excitement and trepidation surged within me, a realisation dawning of the immense undertaking ahead.

"Do you have a plan for approaching this endeavour?" he inquired, his voice blurring with curiosity and concern. My mind raced, grappling with the complexities of the task at hand. I said no more.

Unveiling the Veiled: Traversing the Enigmatic Bara Realm

As the voyage deepened into the Bara region's heart, I immersed myself in their daily lives' peculiarities. Sey, armed with his rifle or hunting shotgun—a commonplace sight among the Bara—led our expedition. This transition from traditional axes to firearms intrigued me, and I pondered the underlying reasons behind the proliferation of such weaponry. In stark contrast, Apollo wielded a makeshift wooden baton, devoid of its axe head, a testament to the resourcefulness of the Bara people.

Traversing the treacherous terrain, we encountered the malevolent barbed wire grass, a formidable adversary reminiscent of Namibia's Nara fruit, with its thorny tendrils resembling a web of entangled barbed wire. Its vengeful assault on unsuspecting passersby left an indelible mark on my memory. Sey,

ever watchful, warned me to be cautious, pointing out a seemingly inconspicuous object hanging beneath a shrub. I chuckled, assuming he referred to a leaf. However, Apollo, exercising utmost care, lifted the branch to reveal an intricate ants' nest, a dwelling that detested prying eyes. I marvelled at Sey's intuitive connection with the land, his ability to sense nature's secrets that eluded me. It was a subtle reminder of our conversation from days prior, which had taken an unexpected turn. The mention of the nuances and esoteric knowledge possessed by the Bara lingered in the air like an enigma waiting to be unravelled.

Curiosity getting the better of me, I probed further, asking Sey about their experiences with bites and stings. His swift but cryptic response left me pondering the true extent of their encounters. Apollo, ever the enigmatic companion, chuckled, acknowledging our unspoken understanding. In the month we had spent together, we had grown attuned to the nuanced dance of revealing and concealing, forging a bond forged in shared uncertainties.

Sey's unwavering vigilance persisted, pointing out every noteworthy detail along our path. I wonder if the same level of attention was granted to the curious tourists who ventured into this realm. Sey's response was ambiguous, "Depends on what they want." His selective disclosures highlighted a unique rapport we had developed—a relationship built on his inclination to share, to point out the intricacies of their world.

Suddenly, Sey's focus shifted entirely to the path ahead, occasionally veering off course as if guided by an invisible scent, tracking an elusive prey. The unspoken signal for silence passed between us, and we adjusted our steps in synchrony, a harmonious rhythm of one foot moving forward, the other sliding cautiously behind. As we continued this mysterious choreography, I struggled to comprehend the purpose behind our stealthy movements. The strain in my muscles intensified, threatening to reveal my discomfort, but silence remained paramount.

Finally, a sound pierced the air, shattering the intensity of our enigmatic trek. "Look!" exclaimed Apollo, beckoning Sey's attention as they engaged in a hushed discussion in Malagasy. Intrigued, I drew closer, peering over their shoulders, only to find myself confronted by a fresh pile of zebu dung. Confusion etched across my face, I voiced my perplexity. However, my words fell upon deaf ears. Apollo's hand grasped my shoulder with an electrifying excitement, urging me onward. Stifling my bewilderment and ignoring the stiffness in my legs from our crouching technique, I convinced myself that this pursuit revolved around mere animal excrement. With renewed determination, I pressed on forward.

After a considerable time, my hopes of mastering the technique had dwindled. The realization dawned upon me that perhaps this was all an elaborate jest. How could I have ever believed that walking in a crouched posture would grant me the same resilience to pain as the Bara people? Nonetheless, I straightened my posture, adopting an air of self-assuredness, and trailed alongside them, casting approving glances in their direction. While they effortlessly covered several thousand meters in this manner, I followed suit.

Suddenly, distant sounds reverberated through the air. Sey extended his hand in front of me, a commanding gesture that implored me to halt, cease all movement, and preserve silence. Apollo stealthily joined our ranks from behind as if synchronized by an invisible thread that bound us together. Smiles accompanied their exchanged glances, and I, unknowingly mirrored their expressions. Sey gradually withdrew his hand and cautiously parted the branches before me. Apollo ventured forth to inspect, and I found myself instinctively aligning with his movements, gazing through the aperture that Sey had crafted.

To my sheer astonishment, an assemblage of Zebu emerged amidst the untamed wilds of the Makay. I was captivated, utterly taken aback and this moment held an ineffable significance, one that could only be truly grasped by immersing oneself in the realms of Bara's country. "Approach, Kadi, draw near and touch them. Capture a photograph for your research," Sey urged, unaware of the fear and disconcerting thoughts that raced through my mind—visions of a stampede of Zebu trampling over me. "No, this distance is perfect," I replied with unwavering conviction. Sey drew closer, his voice a gentle admonition, "Kadi, proceed slowly, eschewing any sudden movements. Crouch down softly and gradually. You shall bear witness to the marvellous spectacle of wild Zebu." The weight of expectation bore down upon me. I resolved to emulate their every action, adopting their ways as my own.

"Kadi! You barely budged an inch," admonished Sey, disappointment etched upon their countenances while the wild herd abruptly bolted away. I fervently hoped this was not an earnest test they expected me to fulfil. What was it about the Zebu that possessed such profound connections to their world? Sey, distinctly disheartened, made me realize that I had failed to prove my mettle in this confrontation with the untamed Zebu. This test had eluded my grasp, a chapter on the Bara people's culture of cattle rearing that had escaped my diligent study.

As we ventured deeper into the wilderness, I seized the opportunity to inquire about the ownership of these wild Zebu. With Sey now slightly ahead, Apollo nonchalantly disclosed they belonged to Sey. The revelation left me dumbfounded, for I had estimated a count of no less than thirty. "Indeed, Sey possesses two to three hundred Zebu that roams freely throughout the Makay," I stammered, struggling to fathom the staggering image painted by Apollo's words. Seeking clarification, I ventured, "Doesn't that make him an exceedingly wealthy individual in theory?" A brief silence followed, eventually broken by Apollo's response, "Yes." Curiosity continued to drive me as I probed, "Are there not individuals attempting to pilfer this Zebu, like the Malaso?"

Apollo cast a discerning gaze upon the surrounding environment before redirecting his attention towards me, his eyes brimming with wisdom. "You see, my friend, the wild Zebu possess an innate ability to flee with astonishing speed, as you just witnessed. They are untamed, unfettered by human control. The Malaso may attempt to seize them, but fortune shall not favour their endeavours." I found myself scanning the terrain, hoping to grasp the essence of Apollo's words, although the reason for my gaze's wanderings eluded me. "Had you been observing with acute awareness," Apollo continued, "you would have borne witness to the tremendous challenge that lies therein. Merely six steps you took, and they vanished into the distance." A surge of comprehension coursed through me, the puzzle pieces falling into place. We resumed our journey with newfound clarity, forging ahead with unwavering determination.

As we ventured deeper into the heart of the Makay, I found myself entangled in a web of contemplation. The notion of Sey awakening to find his precious zebu missing, or the thought of the riches he unknowingly possessed, lingered in my mind. How could they carry on so assuredly, their

days slipping by like the sands of time, oblivious to the potential fortunes that grazed upon their lands? Uncertainty seeped into my thoughts, casting a veil over the path of my inquiry.

"Do you ever worry, Sey?" I mustered the courage to pose the question, allowing it to hang in the air, pregnant with curiosity. Sey paused, his gaze fixated on some distant point as he weighed his response. Apollo stepped in, his voice carrying Sey's unspoken thoughts. "We dwell here, my friend," he declared, a quiet confidence resonating in his words. "True, but you now reside in Tulear." I attempted to inject levity into the discussion, remarking on his relocation. Apollo smiled, and together, we pressed onward, the weight of unanswered questions forging a bond between us.

Though my query remained unanswered, the shared conversations as we waded through the dense foliage held their revelations. Sensing the need for contemplation, I requested a pause, seeking solace from a pile of rocks. I perched myself upon a weathered boulder, allowing the smoke from my cigarette to mingle with the swirling thoughts in my mind.

Numerous inquiries swirled within me, begging to be explored with my Bara companions. "Sey," I began, my voice laced with curiosity, "why do you believe I am here?" A startled expression flitted across his face, uncertainty clouding his features. "I do not know," he responded, his words tinged with bemusement. "Perhaps it is because you write down everything I say, capturing our words for posterity. Why don't you tell me why you are here?" Pauses gazes, and unspoken truths permeated the air. I prodded further, seeking an honest response to my presence in their lives during this fleeting time. Sey's laughter erupted, enveloping the space around us. "Why do you ask all these questions?" he inquired, a mix of innocence and confusion in his eyes. "You are here to explore the caves, to delve into our culture, and decipher the meanings behind the ancient paintings, or so I believe." My eyes shifted to Apollo, his fingers deftly fiddling with the rifle. "Did you inform him, Apollo?" I queried. "I mentioned that you were here to witness the sites, that you possessed a deeper interest compared to the usual Vazaha," he replied, his tone tinged with an unspoken realization.

The shroud of illusion that had enshrouded my understanding suddenly shattered, unveiling a stark truth. Apollo, whom I had known longer than any of the Bara companions, had failed to grasp the true essence of my purpose. Moreover, perhaps, I pondered, they did not possess the same level of investment. However, this revelation did not breed sadness within me but kindled a newfound sense of exploration. I now had a foundation to build, a reality that painted me as a mere tourist in their eyes. With this revelation, everything I had come to know and experience with them was cast into doubt. Had it been my expectations and imagination that had shaped the narrative? I knew, without a shadow of a doubt,

that I had continually renewed my expectations, fueling my fieldwork research with each new encounter. I sought a story.

"The Cave of Transition: Unveiling the Shift from Divination to Tourism"

As we neared the elusive Cave Mahatigny, its magnetic pull tugged at our senses, drawing us closer to the jagged edges of the Makay escarpment. With a final ascent looming before us, we braced ourselves for the culmination of this transformative journey. The vast expanse of the Makay sprawled out before us, a tapestry of mountains stretching in every direction, their peaks adorned with a verdant cloak of the forest. Our focus narrowed to the task as we pressed forward, each of us engrossed in our connection with the surrounding environme nt.

The arid landscape offered little sustenance, save for the meagre streams that trickled through dry riverbeds, offering us a fleeting taste of nourishment. Vegetation was scarce in these unforgiving reaches of the Makay, where the distance between villages made it impossible for any semblance of agriculture to thrive. The spectre of thirst and hunger loomed over us, a constant reminder of the challenges those who ventured into this remote terrain faced.

However, a solemn aura enveloped us as we traversed this sacred realm. Burials and graves dotted the mountains, testaments to the ancestral spirits that watched over this hallowed ground. Sey, ever mindful of the sacredness that permeated the air, chose not to divulge when we approached these sacred sites. Respectfully, I refrained from prying, except for the occasional stolen glance into a crevice or hollow in the mountainside, an instinctual curiosity that Sey gently redirected, aware of the sanctity that shrouded these resting places. In silence, I accepted the unspoken rule, understanding that some things were meant to remain hidden, steeped in the enigmatic mystique of the Makay.

As we stepped into the cave, the flickering light of our torches illuminated the ancient walls, unveiling a rich tapestry of history and wonder. Cave paintings adorned the cavernous space, bearing witness to a bygone era when the Ombiassa, the revered healers and protectors of the community, sought solace within these sacred depths. Every corner of the cave seemed to hold a story, an echo of a time long past. I found myself captivated, sitting at the heart of the cave, eyes closed, embracing a meditative state.

However, a disquieting realization began to stir within me as I observed the nonchalant behaviour of Apollo and Sey. Their casual demeanour clashed with the profound impact the cave and its paintings had on me. Seeking clarity, I probed them about the cave paintings' significance and the cave's sacredness. Nevertheless, their responses offered little more than fragmented snippets of knowledge. Sey explained that the paintings had proliferated during the colonial period, serving as protective charms to ward off outsiders. The practice of the Ombiassa had waned, and the caves had become part of the tourist route through the Makay.

Tourists and locals alike would visit these caves, accompanied by the esteemed Beronono Bara community members who held a certain status. Cave Faratsay remained hidden, a secret sanctuary known only to a select few. It became apparent that these caves and other sacred sites and lakes were intrinsic components of the Makay's allure. They embodied a shared history among the Bara people and other ethnic groups, such as the Sakalava and Betsileo, who had once called this land home.

Sey's words unveiled a different question, redirecting my focus. The caves retained their sacred essence, albeit no longer actively revered. They now stood as remnants of a shared history, a testament to the Bara's cultural heritage. The Bara sought to offer these sites, infused with their stories and significance, to a larger audience. In this intricate tapestry, Nature Evolution, an entity dedicated to conservation, intertwined with the Bara's aspirations for profit and cultural exchange. Other forces remained veiled, yet the notion of tourism emerged as a pivotal factor, beckoning me to explore its multifaceted dimensions.

Within the embrace of Cave Mahatigny, I found guidance and direction. Its cave paintings humbly stood among numerous other socio-cultural sites that piqued the curiosity of foreign visitors. The path ahead materialized before me, illuminated by the sun's radiance pouring in through the cave's opening. The Makay yearned to reveal its secrets to the wider world, and I sensed a profound shift unfolding. Tourism beckoned, offering insights into the enigma of the Vazaha while allowing me to navigate my place within the Bara community.

As we returned to the village, the journey was marked by contemplation. Memories of seemingly random acts, ingrained habits, and immersive customs flooded my thoughts, interwoven with the anecdotal stories that had woven the fabric of life in Beronono village. I realized these experiences were intentionally crafted, shaping my perception and understanding of life among the Bara. Cave Mahatigny had redirected my inquiries, illuminating a new path for exploration. It revealed a reality in which the Makay opened its secrets to the world beyond, inviting me to delve deeper into this transformative process.

With a pen, I inscribed "Tomorrow is going to be a new day" in my journal. Another chapter in the tapestry of Bara country concluded, surrendering to the quiet playfulness of the night.

3 "You're an Anthropologist; you do not realise it yet!"

"It has been some time, Kadi. How are things progressing? Please update me on the progress you have made with your project." The questions came pouring in, and I knew I had all the time in the world to respond. This time, I was better prepared than before.

"The cave was truly amazing, exceeding all my expectations. Every step of the experience was felt, as there was no direct path to reach it. We set out intending to visit the cave, but as life often goes, we found ourselves veering off course from time to time. The smallest things would capture our attention and distract us. After enduring the challenging hours and feeling utterly exhausted, any respite would have been greatly welcomed. The cave became my sanctuary, saving me in ways I cannot even fathom."

Professor X gazed at me as I spoke, gently stroking his beard, his mind seemingly elsewhere. Perhaps he had embarked on a different train of thought. "Hmm, hmm, interesting," I silently concurred, acknowledging the weight of his words.

"And what about the cave paintings? Did they possess the metaphysical agency you had imagined? Or have they now become remnants, integrated into the dynamic and ever-changing history of the place?" Professor X's language always had a way of intimidating me, despite my growing familiarity. Nonetheless, I knew I had to share with him what I believed to be a worthy pursuit in my research.

"Well, it was certainly not as straightforward as I had envisioned. If this were solely an archaeological endeavour, I would have been allowed to examine the cave paintings, explore the cave's surface for artefacts, and perhaps even conduct excavations. However, viewing it through the lens of anthropology required me to observe the reactions and emotions of the Bara people as we encountered the paintings. I realised the significance of their guardianship over information, how they selectively chose what to share and skillfully evaded certain questions with a simple 'I do not know.' The expedition to the cave and the entire process of that day revealed much. The archaeologist in me would have overlooked what preceded the caves and focused solely on the study site. However, the anthropologist within me was awakened when I awoke that day. The cave paintings themselves are utterly fascinating, but they reveal something deeper. I began to discern how they safeguard, protect, and unveil information. They set the pace and tone of the day, even though I was responsible for dictating our daily activities. Most importantly, it became evident that the Makay was already being treated as a commodity."

Professor X immediately seized upon my last statement. "What do you mean by 'a commodity'?" I replied, "To be frank, the Makay is poised to enter the tourist market shortly. It is the current aspiration of the people in Beronono village, and I am certain others are vying for its tourism potential as well. Furthermore, the Nature Evolution NGO strives to solidify its claim over the Makay's scientific research potential. The Beronono Bara have already established a Makay Association to regulate taxation and fees for tourists visiting the Makay and the village. I am confident that more entities will enter the arena as the Makay gains popularity and officially becomes part of Madagascar's tourism circuit."

The ensuing silence proved productive, illuminating this new perspective on my research. Professor X had much to offer and say regarding the potential pursuit of the tourism avenue. After a few moments of contemplation, Professor X resumed communication, enlightening me with new anthropological discourses and expanding on topics I had already delved into within tourism.

"So you must immerse yourself in the realm of tourism, paying heed to its every aspect. From the vivid posters that adorn the streets, the captivating billboards that catch the eye, and the enticing leaflets and brochures that promise unforgettable experiences to the very tourists themselves and the local people, whether directly involved in tourism or not. It is imperative to collect their perspectives, constructing a comprehensive and holistic understanding of tourism concerning the Bara people and

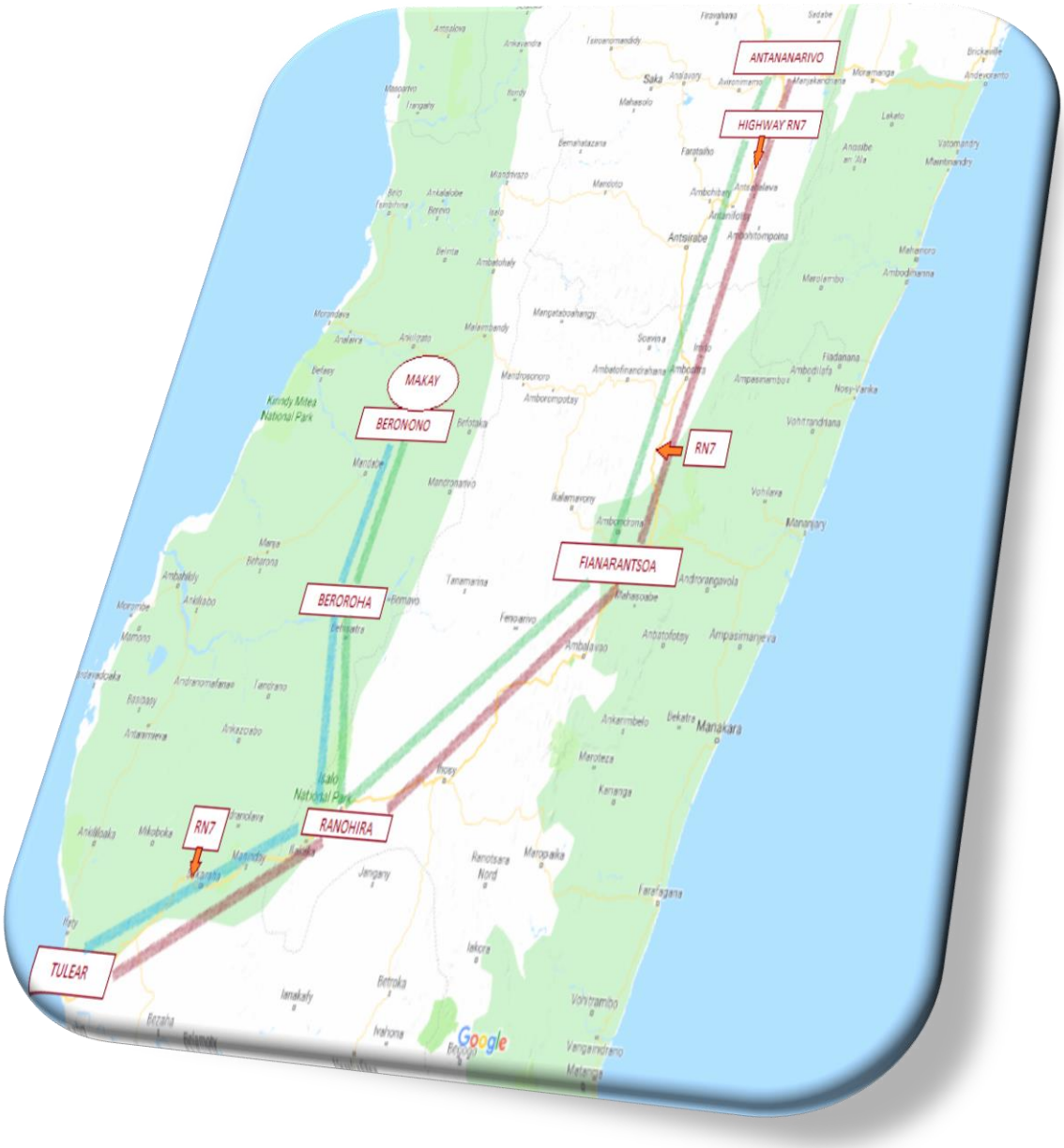
the mystical Makay. This pursuit will undoubtedly lead you down many intricate paths, unravelling questions of indigeneity, ethnicity, heritage, and the profound role of the Bara people as their indigenous archaeologists. You will delve into how they perceive, honour, and recount the rich history of the Makay, intertwined with their own stories and identity. In the vast tapestry of tourist literature, you will encounter the concepts you have already touched upon: authenticity and narratives interwoven within the pages. When all these elements are interwoven, a profound anthropological discourse emerges—a powerful tool to delve into and produce current, relevant works for the field and benefit the Bara people and their extraordinary Massif of Makay venture."

The time had come to set aside the archaeologist within me, placing it on the proverbial shelf. The anthropologist demanded my undivided attention, for a tangible reality was shaping and unfolding in the field. It was not a dismissal of archaeological discourse or perspectives that may arise during my fiedwork. Instead, my focus now rested on meticulously weaving together the tapestry of relevant information, encounters, and newfound material sourced within the realm of tourism and the Makay. Cave Mahatigny had catalyzed this transformative direction in my research. In these moments, I found solace in the wisdom of Joseph Campbell, echoing his words: '*The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek*.'

5

ON THE ROAD

Encounters and Narratives: Exploring Tourism and the Bara Community en route to Beronono Village.



From Tana to Tulear. **Tulear to Beronono.** **Beronono to Tana**

The power of imaginaries cannot be underestimated when it comes to understanding what makes tourism destinations captivating and appealing. They serve as the driving force behind these destinations but also require conduits to keep them circulating and, most importantly, alive (Salazar 2010). These conduits include documentaries, films, art and museum exhibitions, fairs, video games, photographs, travelogues, blogs, websites, guidebooks, tourism brochures, magazines, literature, advertising, official documents, news, and academic productions. To truly comprehend what is being circulated, one must delve into the socio-cultural structures and mechanisms that make it all possible.

It's important to note that these circulations are not just transmitting meanings but also constitutive acts in and of themselves (Lee and LiPuma 2002:192). Culture, therefore, both produce circulation and are a product of it. These imaginaries exist in the global sphere, as the mediums through which they travel can instantly reach a wide range of audiences. This, in turn, can ignite resistance, selectivity, and agency, giving rise to new forms of globalization that blend the global and the local, creating what is known as "glocalization" (Appadurai 1996:7).

This brings us to an interesting point: while tourism has become a global phenomenon, primarily as an economic engine and sociocultural force, it is not only a global product but also a producer of global processes. However, as Ong points out, attention has mostly been paid to the imaginaries and cultural landscapes emerging from these transnational "flows," while less attention has been given to the actors and agents who are part of this movement (1993:93).

It is crucial to remember that the global is not an abstract concept but a project that is mediated by human beings. With this in mind, this chapter aims to shift the focus towards the voices that shape these imaginaries, propagate and export their meaning, and contain the essential ingredients discussed in the literature and the previous chapter. Regardless of the path tourists take, whether they are searching for authenticity or embarking on a sacred journey, the narratives presented in this chapter will provide an outsider's perspective on the Bara people. The Crossing will conclude at Ranohira, the gateway to the heart of the Bara lands.

Tana

“Anais vs Amoan: Contrasting Touristic Visions and Experiences”.

Anais, a French woman with a sweet and soft demeanor, appeared on the balcony of the Tana Jacaranda hotel just as the sun was setting over the picturesque hills of Antananarivo. Our conversation started with the usual small talk, but soon we found ourselves engrossed in a game of cards, intermittently mesmerized by the vibrant colors of the sky. Anais, who had recently finished her

contract with Alliance Francais in Tanzania, shared tales of her travels, capturing my attention with her captivating smile that accompanied every word.

As we delved deeper into our conversation, the topic shifted to the Bara people, whom Anais had encountered during her journey. She described their slightly darker skin tone compared to other Malagasy groups but noted that their friendliness was not exceptional in a country known for its warm hospitality. We pondered whether the locals' interactions with tourists were genuine or simply performative, and Anais shared an intriguing anecdote about how some Malagasy perceive tourists as walking banknotes, albeit without any resentment.

Our card game continued, accompanied by drinks and Anais's fascinating insights. Through our lively exchange, I discovered a newfound way to engage with tourists, seamlessly blending my research interests with genuine conversation. Anais praised the professionalism of the Isalo National Park tourist office, but her fondest memories revolved around the intimate moments of the connection she experienced with the Malagasy people. In Madagascar, she found that the barriers between tourists and hosts quickly dissolved, allowing for profound personal exchanges that transcended cultural expectations.

With the night unfolding on that balcony, Anais and I embarked on a journey of shared stories and mutual understanding, where the beauty of Madagascar's landscapes intertwined with the warmth of its people.

> Me: Did you intentionally seek to forge a genuine connection with the Malagasy people, rather than being perceived solely as a tourist seeking manufactured interactions?
>
> Anais: Not really. My initial intention was to travel here with my partner, immerse myself in a new culture, and marvel at the beauty of the landscape. I believe that human connections naturally unfold everywhere, and I prefer to let conversations evolve organically, rather than seeking specific topics to engage with locals. Does that resonate with you?
>
> Me: Yes, it does. Were there any moments when you felt lost, confused, or even scared? Anais: No, not really. I didn't experience fear or confusion. The only instances of frustration were when it was challenging to reach certain places due to limited transportation options or poor road conditions. Additionally, relying on public transport meant enduring long and unpredictable waiting times. Me: If you found yourself in such situations, how did you navigate them? Anais: In Madagascar, there is always a solution if you let the word spread. For instance, when I was in Ranohira and couldn't wait for the next Taxi Brousse to Tana, a local driver offered to take me and some other tourists to the nearby town of Ilakaka for a

small fee, from where we caught a taxi Brousse to our destination. We took a brief pause and resumed our card game. Despite my inability to win a single round, I couldn't help but notice Anais's unwavering smile. I reciprocated, but at times, I couldn't help feeling a tinge of frustration at the prospect of being deceived. Anais: Have you conversed with many tourists before me? Me: Besides the usual greetings, I haven't made much progress with others. You're the first tourist with whom I've engaged beyond the initial hour, and here we are, having talked about various topics for nearly five hours. Anais: Do you say this to every tourist? Me: Well, no, because unfortunately, I rarely surpass that initial hour of conversation, you see. Anais: That's quite true.

As the night unfolded, Anais and I engaged in a lengthy conversation, surpassing the initial hour that I often spend with tourists. We laughed and played card games on the balcony terrace, oblivious to the passing of time. The genuine connection we formed revealed a mutual appreciation for the richness of human interaction. The sun began to rise, signaling the end of our encounter, yet I knew that Anais had left an indelible mark on my research experience. Her genuine approach and willingness to embrace the unknown were a testament to the transformative power of travel and the potential for deep connections with fellow explorers. Our conversation was just one of many encounters awaiting me in this ethnographic research, a tapestry woven with unique stories and vibrant characters.

Amoan, an assertive and commanding elderly traveler from Israel, joined our conversation on the balcony terrace of the Tana Jacaranda Hotel. Ona, her partner Andres, and I welcomed his sudden entrance, eager to hear his perspective. Amoan expressed his frustration with the local people, perceiving them as confused and lacking vision. He recounted an encounter with a receptionist who struggled to understand his dinner request, leaving him exasperated.

As Amoan continued his experiential rant, I found myself captivated by his insights, considering the dynamics between tourists and locals. I asked him about his favorite experience so far, to which he passionately described the breathtaking and adventurous train journey from Fianarantsoa to Manakara on the east coast. Despite his frustrations, this particular journey through mountain ranges, with its old locomotive and numerous tunnels, had left a lasting impression on him.

Silence fell over our group as we listened, marveling at Amoan's intense pleasure in recounting his train adventure. It became evident that this experience stood in stark contrast to his other encounters in Madagascar. Intrigued, I yearned to hear more, particularly if it touched upon his interactions in the Bara region.

As dinner commenced, the four of us gathered around the table, and Andres broke the silence by questioning Amoan about his expectations in Madagascar. Amoan, true to his assertive nature, expressed his disappointment with the country. He had come to witness the iconic Baobab trees and explore the culture and lifestyle of different regions, but thus far, his experiences had left him unimpressed.

Ona inquired about the basis for his conclusions, prompting Amoan to compare Madagascar with other places he had visited. He cited Namibia as an example of a tourist paradise with efficient communication and transportation systems, highlighting the language barrier and poor infrastructure he encountered in Madagascar. When Ona mentioned the country's economic challenges, Amoan dismissed it, asserting that the people's contentment hindered any desire for change.

Curious, I asked why their happiness was a problem, and Amoan countered that while it was admirable, it didn't align with the expectations of tourists. He criticized the inadequate roads, transportation, and high fees for national parks, questioning the fairness of these conditions. In his eyes, Madagascar seemed lacking in direction and expertise in accommodating tourists, leaving him with a negative impression.

Amoan's observations struck a chord, causing contemplation among us. I seized the opportunity to inquire about his experiences in the Bara region, hoping for insights into my encounters with the locals at Chez Alice. Amoan shared his positive experience, emphasizing the English-speaking staff at the hotel and the relaxed nature of the people there.

His response hinted at the nuances of the Bara people but didn't fully address my question's layers. Nonetheless, I could sense Amoan's genuine connection with Antoine, which aligned with my own experiences.

Amoan then shared an incident in Sakahara, highlighting the lack of organization and a sense of awareness among the locals. The tale elicited laughter from Ona and Andres, finding humor in the situation. It was clear that Amoan's frustrations resonated with us, although we acknowledged that such occurrences were not exclusive to the Bara people.

As the beers dwindled, I wrapped up the conversation by asking Amoan about the first improvement he believed the Malagasy should make for their own and the tourists' benefit. His straightforward response echoed his earlier frustrations: "Learn English!"

Amoan's clear expectations and unwillingness to accept the diverse personalities, cultures, and ways of life in different destinations colored his perception of Madagascar. While some of his observations

held validity, it was important to recognize that each place carries its unique characteristics and challenges

In the realm of my travels and encounters with tourists, two distinct flavors of post-tourists emerge, exemplified by the contrasting approaches of Anais and Amoan. Anais, a gentle breeze of vitality, seeks authentic connections and craves the vibrant tapestry of cultures, allowing experiences to unfold naturally. On the other hand, Amoan embraces adventure, albeit with a desire for safety, holding onto his preconceived notions and yearning for the familiar. As my research unfolds, their paths diverge, with Anais breathing life into every encounter while Amoan finds solace in reminiscing about lands gone by, revealing the intricate interplay between the thirst for authenticity and the allure of the known.

"Nicolas: Navigating Cultural Boundaries and Embracing the Future"

The following vignette depicting my interactions with Nicolas, a Malagasy undergraduate student, holds significant importance within the broader ethnographic context. It serves as a vivid illustration of the intricate dynamics at play between my role as a researcher, outsider, tourist, and the label of Vazaha bestowed upon me by the Bara people. As an ethnographer delving into the depths of Malagasy culture, it becomes crucial to examine the impressions I left on the communities I encountered. Nicolas, with his youthful wisdom and insightful observations, becomes a crucial lens through which to explore the multifaceted nature of these impressions. By sharing our experiences and dialogues, this vignette highlights the complexities of engaging with the local population, the fluidity of identity, and the power dynamics inherent in ethnographic research. It serves as a reminder that our encounters and interactions as researchers have a profound impact on the communities we study, shaping their perceptions and contributing to the construction of our ethnographic narratives

Nicolas, a promising undergraduate student of Mathematics and the nephew of a Ph.D. researcher studying the rock art assemblage of Isalo, plays a significant role in this ethnographic account. Introduced to me by Nado, the Ph.D. researcher, Nicolas becomes my trusted companion during the initial research expedition in Tana and the southern region and later embarks on a fieldwork travels with me to Bara country. Despite our contrasting approaches, his intellectual acumen serves as a

harmonious counterbalance to my more methodical and pragmatic tendencies as a researcher, and his presence proves instrumental in shaping my anthropological identity.

Our friendship is replete with captivating stories, each worthy of an entire chapter. Our initial encounter sets the tone for our burgeoning bond. Seated on the balcony terrace of my hostel in Tana, Nicolas cautiously enters the conversation, introducing himself. Thanks to Nado's briefing, he possesses a clear understanding of my research interests and goals, which allows us to dive straight into discussions about Shamanism and various aspects of Malagasy life. Looking back, it is amusing to recall Nicolas confessing his initial skepticism toward me. When he agreed to accompany me on our first venture south, his mother advised him to exercise caution and remain vigilant during our shared sleeping hours. Perplexed, I inquire further, and he explains that his mother harbored concerns that I might be a fraudulent individual, capable of stealing his limbs or engaging in some Vazaha-led operation involving kidnapping for trafficking purposes. In hindsight, we both laugh at the missed opportunity that such unfounded worries represented.

Curiosity piqued; Nicolas expresses a genuine interest in the progress of my research. We exchange countless anecdotes as we visit various Ombiassas in different cities along our route to Bara country. Initially focused on understanding divinatory practices and deciphering the associated imagery, my research had taken an unexpected turn during my time spent with the Bara people of the Beronono village. I seize the opportunity to update Nicolas on the new insights and questions that emerged from this immersive experience, shaping the shifting trajectory of my investigations.

Nicolas expressed interest in the progress of my research, and we reminisced about our experiences visiting Ombiassas in different cities along our route to Bara country. I explained that my initial focus was on understanding divinatory practices and the associated imagery, intending to link them to the cave paintings. However, my time spent with the Bara people in the Beronono village led to a new focus.

"Yes, I am now studying the Vazaha," I replied. "Living with the Beronono people allowed me to better understand them as a Vazaha than trying to comprehend their divination practices."

Nicolas wondered if the cave paintings were still a focus of my research. I shared that I had indeed seen them, and while the caves were breathtaking, the divination aspect proved more challenging to grasp. The Bara people shared limited knowledge, only enough to write about with years of further study.

"Why are you now studying the Vazaha, then?" Nicolas asked.

"To be honest, the Makay Massif has become a commodity sought after by the Vazaha," I explained. "I was asked numerous times to promote the site upon my return to England and include its beauty in my thesis. The Bara people themselves exploit the cultural market around the cave paintings. I find it intriguing to study the expectations and narratives of the tourists who visit. From our expeditions, I've collected stories and notes about the Vazaha we encountered in Bara country."

We then recalled our journey through Bara country in a bush taxi, where everyone was surprised by my choice instead of opting for a 4x4 like most Vazaha. They commented on my presence in the truck, stating that there were no Vazaha, only Malagasy people (short form - Gasi).

"You see, you do as we do," Nicolas remarked. "Even when eating cassava, they questioned why you behaved like them. It surprised them because the Vazaha they knew didn't embrace local customs or accept the bush taxi as part of daily life."

"I understand what you mean," I replied. "But you must realize I had no choice, especially considering the dangers of traveling in a small group in a 4x4 in Bara country. It was safer to be in a truck with 40 people."

So we endured the sweltering heat in silence, observing the tourists that appeared before us in Tana, capturing the city's vibrant scenes with their cameras.

Nicolas shows a keen interest in my plans to interview more tourists and asks about the methods I employ to encounter them. I inform him that I have already established connections with a few intriguing individuals whom I intend to stay in contact with. Additionally, I am awaiting the arrival of an anthropology student who is currently traveling in the western region of Madagascar. Once she arrives in Tana, I plan to spend a few more days in the capital before returning to Bara country.

Nicolas, intrigued by the idea of interacting with tourists, comments on the fortunate position I find myself in as a researcher. I remind him that one doesn't need to be a researcher to engage with tourists, often a simple greeting is enough. Moreover, I playfully remind him of the title bestowed upon him by the Bara people – Nicolas 'The Future'. I encourage him to embrace this name and live up to the expectations that come with it.

Recalling the peculiar circumstances in which Nicolas received this venerable title, it happened during a session with an Ombiasa, a diviner, in a nearby village close to Ranohira. The interview was drawing to a close, and we sat inside a dimly lit mud hut, the only light seeping through a partially closed front door. The Ombiasa had just concluded a demonstration of a divination ritual and turned to Nicolas, posing him some questions. Anxious and unsure, I sat in silence, consumed by a mix of anxiety and

paranoia. Nicolas, sensing our discomfort, discreetly nudged my knee, signaling his desire to end the session. As we found a reason to politely conclude the conversation, we stepped out of the hut into a world flooded with light, a stark contrast to the darkness we had been immersed in moments before. It was at that moment, as the Ombiasa emerged from the shadows of his dwelling, that he exclaimed to Nicolas that he is the future. Since then, the name has followed and haunted him.

The eerie ambiance of Ombiasa households was a recurring theme in our visits to various practitioners. Initially unsettling, these encounters would have left a lasting impact if not for our mutual reassurances that we would emerge unharmed after each sitting. It is not an exaggeration to say that without our supportive camaraderie, these experiences may have scarred me indefinitely.

Throughout my experiences with Nicolas, a fascinating exploration of the term "Vazaha" unfolded, shedding light on its shifting meanings within different circumstances and contexts. As an outsider myself, initially labeled as a Vazaha by the Malagasy people, I found myself navigating the complexities of this classification. Our fieldwork exploits together exposed the nuanced nature of this term, revealing its malleability and the diverse ways in which it can be interpreted. In the realm of the Bara people, the designation of Vazaha extended beyond its usual connotation of a foreigner and encapsulated a distinct set of behaviors and expectations. Nicolas and I became witnesses to the contrasting perceptions of being a Vazaha as we traversed through Bara country, where the locals expressed surprise at my willingness to embrace their way of life, such as traveling in a crowded bush taxi rather than a comfortable 4x4 vehicle. These encounters not only challenged the preconceived notions associated with the term Vazaha but also prompted reflections on the fluidity of identity and the negotiation of cultural boundaries in ethnographic research.

VAZAHA: Unravelling Layers of Perception and Colonial Legacy

The concept of Vazaha, often understood as an outsider, reveals itself to be a multifaceted term upon closer examination. As Bakhtin reminds us, words carry the weight of their historical contexts and lived experiences (1981:293). In Madagascar, the term Vazaha carries connotations linked to its colonial origins, particularly in the case of the Betsimisaraka and Karembola ethnic groups residing in the East

and Northeast regions. For the Malagasy people, the Vazaha wield the power to either uplift them and foster growth or reduce them to subservience and dependency. This perception is not uncommon, as Feeley-Harnik (1991) and Graeber (1996) note the widespread belief in the enslaving power of the Vazaha.

As a researcher and tourist embodying the Vazaha identity, I have encountered the term in various forms, whether subtly implied or directly directed at me. It is worth mentioning Middleton's encounter with a woman who expressed how the Vazaha enables the Malagasy to attain cleanliness akin to their own (Cole and Middleton 2001:12). This impression of the Vazaha as a catalyst for change and opportunity resonates not only in Madagascar but also within the context of tourism. The Vazaha, in this sense, becomes an emblem of possibility and progress.

Historical accounts shed light on the early encounters between the Vazaha and the Bara tribe. Joseph Mullens, in his travels during 1876/1877, describes the Bara's favourable reception of the English despite finding their appearance, language, and hairstyles uncouth (Recent Journeys in Madagascar: 157-59). The English were seen as kind and knowledgeable, capable of providing medical aid and imparting wisdom. These encounters illustrate how the perception of the Vazaha can be shaped by historical interactions and cultural exchanges.

An intriguing aspect of the Vazaha concept lies in its integration into ancestral worship practices. In the Bara tribe, ancestral worship, known as "Fombam-draza" and "Tapasiry," holds significant importance in their history and present. Ancestor worship, as explored by Meyer Fortes (1961, 1965) in West Africa, finds resonance in Madagascar as well.

Within Karembola, the spirit pantheon is divided into three distinct categories: the "lolo" (recently deceased), the "Vazaha biby" (fearsome and intrusive spirits), and the "Razane" (generative ancestors who nurture the living) (Cole and Middleton 2001:15). This incorporation of the Vazaha into the ancestral pantheon intertwines political, colonial, and social histories. The political economy of death, as described by Feeley-Harnik (1984), reveals an ongoing relationship between the ancestral realm and the embodiment of colonial history represented by the Vazaha. For example, the "lolo" spirits seek foreign objects, while the "Razane" ancestors expect adherence to customs, reflecting the complexities of the colonial past.

Considering my present experiences, one cannot overlook the possibility that tourism not only invokes the Vazaha with its deep historical connotations but also adds another dimension in which the Malagasy are compelled to reclaim what was taken from them, perceiving tourists as potential sources of financial gain. While tourism and colonial history are distinct processes,

the Vazaha, in the eyes of the Malagasy, seems to navigate both realms intermittently, bridging past and present perceptions.

"Preserving Identity Amidst Tourism: Malala's Journey as a Local Guide"

Madagascar, a land of vibrant landscapes and cultural wonders, has become an increasingly popular destination for tourists seeking unique experiences. As a researcher delving into the intricacies of tourism in this enchanting country, I realized the significance of gaining perspectives from the Malagasy people involved in the industry. I embarked on a mission to engage with the official representatives of the tourism sector. In the bustling streets of Tana, amidst the sweltering heat and broken cobblestone paths, I made my way to the Madagascar National Tourism Board, my first stop among several planned for the day. Navigating through the maze of narrow streets, I finally found the tucked-away office, a modest space adorned with air conditioning—a welcome respite from the scorching temperatures. Madame Seheno, the welcoming presence within the room, initially mistook me for a lost traveler seeking directions. However, upon learning of my research intentions, she expressed her enthusiasm to assist me. While unable to provide detailed information on specific regions like the Makay Massif, she shared valuable insights into the state of the tourism sector in Madagascar. According to her, the industry was still in its infancy, with the government actively engaged in planning strategies to boost tourism numbers and address existing challenges between local communities and official structures. Encouraged by Madame Seheno, I proceeded to my next destination—the Ortana Park tourism office—meandering through the lively streets adorned with street vendors and the occasional greetings from locals, both familiar and new. Amidst the charm of Ortana Park's Jacaranda trees, whose blossoms showered visitors with refreshing water, I marveled at the hidden beauty and contemplated the multifaceted nature of tourism in Madagascar.

The central office in the park seemed like the ideal spot to gather data from numerous tourists. However, a thought crossed my mind as I approached the entrance – the mention of a tour guide named Malala who wore flowery pants. With this clue in mind, given by Korean tourists who had encountered her a week ago, I set out to find her amidst the Ortana tourist staff members who were unaware of the Makay Massif. Leafing through available brochures, I realized there was no information about the Makay, prompting me to wonder whom I should approach for updates on its progress and potential recognition as a national or UNESCO heritage site. Seeking a moment of respite, I found a vacant bench in the park, contemplating life amidst the bustling crowd of street vendors and hustlers. Engaged in this reflective state, I was offered a newspaper, which I declined with a few laughs exchanged. After some time, I realized my purpose had momentarily slipped away until a gentle nudge

from a lady nearby pointed me towards a girl wearing flowery pants entering the park. Filled with excitement, I approached her and, to my delight, she turned out to be Malala. Without much persuasion, she agreed to join me for a coffee and a discussion, leaving me grateful for the small gestures of shared humanity.

In a cozy local café, away from the bustling crowds, Malala and I sat down for a conversation about tourism in Madagascar. As we enjoyed our meal of Grilled Tilapia and a mountain of rice, Malala shared her perspective on the country's tourism industry. She emphasized that the government's focus lies primarily on agriculture, with tourism taking a backseat. Despite Madagascar's natural beauty and resources, the political instability and recurring health issues like the plague epidemic have dampened the enthusiasm for tourism. Malala also mentioned the Malaso phenomenon in the south, which contributes to the negative image outsiders have of the country.

However, she did mention that the Ministry of Tourism is making efforts to change this perception and improve the accessibility and professionalism of the industry. Currently, the sector is largely privately run, causing tension between locals and tourism agents due to unequal profit distribution. Malala believes that creating a stable and officially recognized infrastructure, along with an ethical code established by the Ministry, can bring about positive changes. She is working towards obtaining her national guide badge to contribute to the industry's growth.

During our conversation, I couldn't help but ask about her flowery pants, which led her to explain the Ministry's clothing guidelines for tourism professionals. Presentable attire, without visible tattoos and excessive attractiveness, is required. Tour guides must also be sociable, accommodating to all types of tourists, and have a comfortable grasp of French and/or English.

As our discussion continued, I realized that the tourism industry in Madagascar faces both challenges and opportunities, and Malala's insights shed light on the ongoing efforts to shape its future.

The Institute of Tourism served as the official gateway for tour guides to obtain their badges. Malala explained that while a degree was required to become a regional guide, locals in rural areas, with their intimate knowledge of local history and environment, could become guides without the need for minimum experience. In the off-season, rural guides could receive training from officials to enhance their knowledge and prepare for the future official setup. This move aimed to discourage unauthorized tour guides from offering bespoke tours at arbitrary prices, providing tourists with a badge-wearing guide as a symbol of authenticity and security.

The formalization of the tourism sector would begin with popular tourist destinations, where agencies would need to comply with regulations and ensure guides had proper equipment and training. In

private tour arrangements, the price and expenses would be agreed upon by the tourist and guide, including necessary equipment costs.

Malala and I continued our conversations, gradually building trust and exchanging numbers. We often met for coffee on her breaks, discussing various topics related to tourism and sharing anecdotes of our day. During one such meeting, in a local café near a market square, I asked her about her experiences with tourists from her guided tours. The urban landscape of Tana, filled with congested market stalls integrated into any available space, served as our backdrop.

The locals often assumed that Malala and I were a couple, drawing curious stares and opinions about our relationship. While the notion of a Vazaha (foreigner) with a local sparked discussion regarding its acceptability and validity, we paid little attention to these opinions. As I had learned from conversations with locals, I couldn't be certain if they were referring to genuine relationships or sexual tourism, topics in which I lacked personal experience.

Sitting in the café, sipping iced coffee, we found solace amidst the polluted sounds outside. Malala began sharing her thoughts, noting that French-speaking tourists, particularly those from France, could be demanding and judgmental, often using their history as a power card. They expected high-quality services but were unwilling to pay the extra price. Malala faced criticism even before starting tours, highlighting the challenges she encountered as a tour guide.

Listening intently, I realized her words held valuable insights, prompting me to jot down these intriguing thoughts.

Malala: Honesty is key for me in my work as a tour guide. I admit when I don't know an answer and appreciate sincere tourists who inquire about local life. However, some tourists complain and seem dissatisfied with everything, making me question why they travel if they don't understand the concept of visiting another country. I review my work and welcome criticism to improve.

Me: How has this job changed you personally?

Malala: As a young person, I saw travel as a holiday, a superficial experience. But being a tour guide has deepened my appreciation for Madagascar. I've learned more about our history, culture, and the island's diversity. Interacting with people from around the world has allowed me to see the beauty of Madagascar through their eyes. I now love my country more than ever before, thanks to this opportunity.

I planned to stay in Tana for two more days, awaiting the arrival of Nina, a fellow anthropology graduate. My intention for the day was to catch up on news and articles. However, in Madagascar,

unexpected invitations and discoveries often lead to detours from my plans, either filling the day with unexpected events or leaving me with nothing to do.

Sitting in the hostel lounge, observing the tranquil atmosphere as guests departed early or slept in, brought moments of serenity. The hostel staff had grown accustomed to my presence and would either let me be or ask about my plans. I enjoyed teasing them with playful jokes. Suddenly, my phone buzzed with a text message from Malala.

I had the opportunity to meet a Bara student who had just completed her Master, focusing on the Isalo region and tourism within Bara country. This was the kind of information I was seeking. I accepted the meeting, putting my plans to read articles and news on hold for another day.

Malala, the local tour guide in Madagascar, embodies the intricate interplay between tourism, heritage, and identity. Through her experiences, we gain insight into how tourists shape the perception of a place, and how locals like Malala strive to retain their individual and collective identity amidst these influences.

Tourism has a profound impact on how local communities view their heritage and sense of self. Malala's encounters with French-speaking tourists exemplify this dynamic. Some tourists, asserting historical superiority, create an uncomfortable atmosphere for her as a guide. The demand for high-quality services without an understanding of the local context undermines the authenticity of the experience.

Amidst the influx of tourists and their expectations, locals like Malala endeavor to preserve their authenticity. Being a tour guide becomes an opportunity for personal growth and a deepening connection to her country. Through interactions with tourists, Malala gains a fresh perspective on the beauty and diversity of Madagascar, rediscovering her appreciation for her heritage. By remaining committed to honesty and openness, she subverts external influences and presents her country's culture and history authentically.

In efforts to retain agency and control over their narrative, locals like Malala actively participate in the formalization of the tourism sector. They seek to establish transparent and fair systems, such as official badges for tour guides, to enhance trust and provide security for tourists while protecting the integrity of local culture. Through their endeavors, they shape the impression of their heritage, identity, and place in the world, ensuring that the true essence of their community endures amidst the ebb and flow of tourism.

"Unveiling Bara Perspectives: Conversations with Akana on Tourism and Traditions"

Malala had arranged a meeting with Akana at the busy bus station. Amidst the chaotic atmosphere, I felt the curious gazes of locals as a Vazaha taking the bus. Akana finally found me and led me to a park across the street, where we sought respite from the bustling surroundings. As we conversed, Akana shared insights into tourism in the Bara region, emphasizing the significance of ecotourism and the popularity of Isalo National Park as a destination.

The Bara population predominantly inhabited the Isalo region, along with other ethnic groups such as Betsileo, Merina, Antemoro, and Antandroy. In the deep Bara country, including Beronono village, the Bara were the dominant group. We explored the impacts of tourism on local culture, focusing on the potential for the development of the Makay du Massif as a tourism route for the village.

By understanding the dynamics of tourism and its effects on the Bara community, I aimed to gain insights that would contribute to a more informed approach to developing sustainable and culturally respectful tourism in the region.

Akana and I discussed the motivations behind including the Makay du Massif in the tourism circuit and designating it as a national heritage site. While I mentioned the involvement of the NGO 'Nature Evolution' and their rediscovery of cave paintings, I had yet to directly explore the aspirations of the Bara people in Beronono village regarding heritage site status. The Nature Evolution NGO's description of the Makay as 'The Last Eden of Madagascar' resonated with both the Beronono Bara and their pursuit of that recognition.

During our conversation, we briefly observed a minor altercation among a few individuals, which quickly resolved without major conflict. Such encounters were common in Madagascar and often stemmed from conversational styles rather than genuine disagreements. Returning to our discussion, Akana explored themes relevant to the tourism aspirations of the Beronono village Bara. The Makay du Massif, as a tourist destination, was still in its early stages, known primarily through word of mouth and encounters at Ranohira. The Nature Evolution NGO researchers were the only intermittent visitors, studying the area's flora, fauna, and archaeology.

In contrast, the Isalo region, with its well-established Isalo National Park, required less promotion. The park attracted numerous tourists, resulting in the development of hotels, job opportunities, and community projects in Ranohira funded by park entrance fees. The influx of tourists not only brought

economic benefits but also facilitated cultural exchange, although initial mistrust and wariness sometimes hindered such interactions.

The Bara's deep attachment to their ancestral customs, known as fomban-draza, defines their way of life and sets them apart as a distinct society. Their customs are fiercely protected, and any disruption is viewed as a threat to their existence. This independent and unique nature has earned them the label of "the wild people" by those from other regions.

Tourism has brought seasonal changes to the Bara's activities. During the peak tourist season from July to November, there is a surge in craftwork and trade, leading to expanded artisanal skills and employment opportunities, particularly for young men. The growth of sustainable infrastructure and the support of organizations like Madagascar National Parks have contributed to increased services and income for the Bara. However, the issue of cattle theft, known as Malaso, still poses security challenges, impacting tourism in the region and overshadowing its natural beauty and diverse traditions.

In the Bara society, cultural customs and tourism are closely intertwined. The Bara's reliance on ancestral guidance and the protection of burial tombs highlight the deep connection between their customs and the preservation of natural wonders like Isalo. Access to these sites is restricted, even for the Bara themselves, demonstrating the importance of cultural preservation alongside tourism engagement.

As the sun set over Tana's hilly landscape, Akana and I sat in the park, reflecting on the negative impacts of tourism in Bara country. Time was running short, and this conversation marked my final opportunity to gather insights before returning to Bara country.

The Plan of Development and Management (PAG) for Isalo National Park aims to conserve and sustainably manage the park. However, looking beyond the initial proposal reveals some underlying issues in the Isalo tourism sector. Akana emphasized that the focus on ecotourism by Madagascar National Parks (MNP) has led to positive outcomes, such as supporting local schools, assisting farmers, enhancing security, and funding community projects. However, a negative aspect that accompanies tourism is sexual tourism, which is prevalent in Isalo. The increasing number of tourists visiting the park creates a divide in their interests outside the park. While some tourists engage in socially acceptable activities, others participate in morally questionable behaviors, including paying for sex.

According to Akana, poverty primarily drives this phenomenon. Income inequality in the region means that only a portion of the locals directly involved in the tourism industry benefits from the wealth brought by tourists. For those on the outside, there is a sense of urgency to meet their needs. Selling

their bodies becomes a way for locals to access the tourist wealth. This mindset also encourages young people to forgo education and seek relationships with tourists in the hope of improving their circumstances.

The responsibility also lies with parents, as education is not compulsory in the Bara community, which follows semi-pastoral livelihoods. The Vazaha (foreigners) represent a pathway to a better life and are viewed as walking banknotes. Many young men and women are enticed by the prospects offered by tourists, neglecting their education and personal development.

Akana's viewpoint cannot be entirely refuted. The push for tourism, driven by the desire for monetary gain, has unintended consequences that the Bara are yet to address. These include socio-cultural impacts, such as a sense of materialism to keep up with a modernized image of society. The Bara, like others, showcase high-end mobile phones and wear branded Western clothing to project an image of being on par with Vazaha tourists.

The younger generation in Bara society appears to have a lesser attachment to their ancestral customs, possibly influenced by the presence of tourism and Vazaha. I asked Akana if this shift would lead to incremental or innovative changes beyond traditional customs. She explained that despite the perceptions of the younger generation, the Bara overall hold a deep attachment to their ancestral customs and value ideological elements over material pursuits. However, with the internet now accessible in many Bara towns, there may be a potential change in mindset over time. Akana found this point interesting and suggested that only time will reveal the outcome.

The conversation then focused on sexual tourism, which is pervasive in the poverty-stricken region. For many locals, the money brought by Vazaha tourists is seen as a golden ticket due to limited opportunities. However, the acquired money quickly leaves, creating a cycle of disillusionment. Reflecting on my time in the interior of Bara country, I realized that these issues are intertwined with the constant presence of Vazaha throughout the seasons. In remote villages like Beronono, tourists are scarce, except for NGO researchers. I wondered if they too could succumb to the temptations of "easy money" or if their semi-pastoral lifestyle kept them more aware of the world despite being somewhat isolated in time.

As Akana caught her bus and bid farewell, I realized the need to review my notes from our conversation. The city of Tana was now enveloped in low light, with orange lamplights guiding me through the quiet streets. Despite the uphill journey back, I chose the main avenue and passed through Ortana Park, becoming a familiar presence to the street kids who walked with me out of

delight rather than seeking money. Finally, as I reached my dorm bed, it was time to rest and turn off the lights.

The conversation with Akana shed light on the potential implications of tourism for the Beronono Bara and their territory. As the larger Bara towns have experienced increased tourist presence, it is evident that tourism has brought both positive and negative changes. On one hand, tourism has stimulated economic activities and provided job opportunities for the local population, particularly in craftwork, transportation, and guiding services. This has offered the Beronono Bara a chance to showcase their artisanal skills and generate income, addressing the limited job prospects in the region.

However, the influx of tourists has also introduced new challenges and changes to the social fabric of the larger Bara towns. The commercialization of culture and the demand for specific tourist experiences may lead to the commodification of traditions and a potential loss of authenticity. Furthermore, the presence of outsiders may disrupt the dynamics of the local community, potentially altering power dynamics and social relationships within the Bara society. It is crucial for the Beronono Bara to carefully navigate these changes, ensuring that tourism respects their cultural values and traditions while also benefiting their community in sustainable and equitable ways.

The conversation with Akana emphasized the need for tourism to go beyond its economic aspects and deeply engage with the Bara society. It is essential to strike a balance between preserving their ancestral customs and traditions, protecting their territories and natural resources, and actively participating in tourism activities that align with their values. By actively involving the Beronono Bara in the decision-making processes and ensuring that their voices are heard, tourism has the potential to become a catalyst for cultural preservation, community empowerment, and sustainable development in the Bara region.

"Mora Mora: Embracing the Rhythm of Time in Madagascar"

Waking up with the prospect of my last day in Tana before returning to Bara country, I felt a mix of excitement and anticipation. A meeting had been arranged with Narindra's former archaeology classmate, now working for the Madagascar division of UNESCO. It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up.

Over breakfast at Madagascar Underground, a hub for Peace Corps volunteers and researchers, I hoped to glean insights from fellow guests who had explored Bara country and the Makay. Unfortunately, luck wasn't on my side. Amidst the morning rush, Ona and Andres surprised me with a visit, sharing their upcoming journey south. Just as I received a text from Narindra, we said our goodbyes and promised to stay in touch.

As I sat outside the Museum of Archaeology, taking in the heat and observing street vendors, I contemplated the concept of 'Mora Mora,' which encapsulates the slow rhythm of Malagasy life. Narindra, dressed casually yet purposefully, appeared before me, signaling our meeting with someone important. Narindra had a knack for poetic expressions that diffused the tension, and we engaged in conversation about my frustration with Mora Mora. He eloquently explained its essence, comparing watches made for the Swiss and time made for the Malagasy. His words brought clarity, transforming Mora Mora from a mechanical notion into a profound experience—a rebellion against easy explanations, embodying both order and defiance.

As Narindra and I rode in the taxi, we discussed various topics, and he provided background information about his friend. Approaching the office in the developed part of town, we marveled at the towering glass and concrete buildings that housed the corporate headquarters. The surroundings were a striking contrast to the Tana I was familiar with, featuring manicured lawns and elegant fountains. People moved with a sense of purpose and dressed formally.

Inside the complex, we underwent temperature checks and left our passports at the security desk. These protocols made me reflect on the possibility of failure. The corridors were sweltering, adorned with minimal decorations and sporadic electric fans. Eventually, we reached the correct office.

Madam Rintsamahefa Rabenmantsoa, a short and kind woman, welcomed us from the back of the room. As we conversed amidst the busy atmosphere, I summarized my inquiries about the Makay du Massif. Madam Rintsamahefa explained that the application for heritage site status was under consideration but couldn't provide definitive information on its current status. She highlighted the challenges surrounding the complex, including its association with multiple ethnic groups, the Malaso tradition, and the remote location in the highlands. Security emerged as a prominent concern, considering the overall instability in Madagascar and the need to address the cultural and logistical aspects of tourism in the area.

As Narindra and Madam Rintsamahefa discussed, I pondered the potential for the Makay du Massif to become a heritage site if security measures were implemented and the Bara's trust was gained. Madam Rintsamahefa explained that predicting the outcome was challenging due to the varying

perspectives on cultural heritage among different ethnic groups in Madagascar. The success of tourism often had unclear underlying factors.

Leaving the complex, I felt disheartened by the perceived stagnation of the Makay. It seemed that the Bara were viewed as unstable and untrustworthy, hindering progress towards heritage site status. Recognizing that this interpretation might be subjective, I decided to return to Bara country to continue my research and engage with tourists there. Narindra agreed, understanding the importance of gaining a more authentic perspective. Before leaving Tana, there was one more person I wanted to meet: Nina, the anthropologist, who was due to arrive later.

Before parting ways, Narindra and I shared a beer at a local bar. As we observed the diverse crowd, including older men interacting with young Gasy women, Narindra advised me to accept the situation without dwelling on it. His nonchalant stance raised questions about the role of outsiders in sexual tourism and their complicity. Despite his understanding, he seemed content with his position and the power dynamics at play.

Suppressing my emotions, I embraced the everyday observations around me while awaiting Nina's delayed arrival. Time passed, and Narindra prepared to leave. He inquired about my shift away from divination and cave paintings in Bara country. I explained the challenges of gaining deeper insights from the Bara and my curiosity about their perceptions of outsiders and the potential impact of tourism on their way of life. Tourism offered an avenue to explore these questions while serving my main objective in Madagascar. As Nina's message confirmed her delay, I resolved to depart in the evening, eager to hit the road once again

Traveling at night poses certain risks, with reduced security and an increased chance of encountering bandits. Narindra advised me to wait until morning, but I was determined to leave Tana as quickly as possible. My only option was to seek out any fellow travelers, including Vazaha, who might be willing to accompany me on my fieldtrip southward, away from the city.

The conversation with Narindra and Rintsamahefa revealed the hindrances and halts imposed on the Bara by imaginaries and stereotypes. It became apparent that these ingrained perceptions, both internal and external, cast the Bara as unstable and untrustworthy, impeding their progress. This realization ignited a sense of empathy and responsibility within me, compelling me to challenge these barriers and amplify their voices, shedding light on their rich history and dispelling misconceptions.

With renewed determination, I committed to immersing myself in Bara country, engaging directly with the community, and creating spaces where their stories could be valued. I intended to confront uncomfortable truths and challenge the imaginaries and stereotypes that held back the Bara

community. Through my interactions with the Beronono Bara, I aimed to empower their narrative to thrive on its terms.

“Do you taxi-brousse bro!”

Arriving at the bus station in Tana alone, I realized it was a spontaneous decision. The station was abuzz with a diverse mix of locals, street vendors, taxi drivers, and security personnel. After securing a ticket with Mafioso, a reputable company Nicolas and his aunt recommended, I found myself waiting for the bus. Time seemed to stretch endlessly in the station, adhering to the concept of "Mora Mora." Sitting outside the bus, I observed the vibrant chaos around me, finding solace.

As I fought off sleep, my eyes wandered to the bus's rooftop, where a peculiar assortment of items was being loaded, ranging from wheelbarrows to live animals. The bus preparations were far from

complete, and I needed something to keep me awake. Just then, Nicolas called, warning me about a bridge collapse near Antsirabe, but no one at the station seemed concerned. Messages from my Malagasy friends echoed similar advice to wait until morning. While I acknowledged the risks of nighttime travel, having people message back provided comfort and distraction. Returning to my seat, surrounded by a predominantly Betsileo and Vezo crowd, I noticed a figure in white approaching—a fellow Vazaha, without the need for introductions, as we were the only two embarking on this travel.

"Augustine: The Post-Tourist - A Journey of Silent Observation and Spiritual Connection"

Augustine, my newfound companion, was also heading to Tulear. His choice to wear an Islamic Topi, a religious hat usually worn during prayers, caught my attention. Curious, I asked him about it, and his response was humorous and insightful.

Augustine: I know you might think I'm from Pakistan because of my appearance, the beard, and the Topi. But I'm actually from Argentina. I wear this because I've learned that in Africa, people have a certain respect for the Arabs and a man of faith. I wore it in Tana at night; nobody bothered me, not even the kids. It works, my friend; it works.

I could only respond with a smile and a nod, impressed by Augustine's clever approach. He was well-travelled, but I decided to pace our conversation, considering the long journey ahead of us—approximately 12 to 13 hours without delays.

We were seated in the third row, thankfully next to the window. However, it would be challenging to take short breaks, as most passengers preferred to stay in their seats. Mafioso, the bus company, had a commendable policy of not accepting additional passengers once the bus reached its maximum capacity. However, other drivers would often pick up people along the roadside, maximizing their profits at the expense of our comfort. As the darkness enveloped us, most people dozed off or engaged in subdued conversations, signalling that sleep was imminent.

Turning to Augustine, we continued our conversation. I asked him why he was going to Tulear, and his response brought me joy. Augustine mentioned that he had heard at MU hostel, where he was staying, that I was heading to Tulear and had already gone to the bus station. Intrigued, he decided to catch up with me there. I asked him how he recognized me, and he explained that he had heard about my

presence during a conversation with other tourists the previous evening. It was fascinating how our paths crossed without meeting at the hostel.

Our discussion veered towards taking the bus at night and the associated dangers and concerns. While it was prudent to minimize risks, Augustine and I were eager to experience and immerse ourselves in the local way of life, as others have expressed in the graffiti at MU hostel's restroom: "Have you Taxi Brousse yet bro?" The taxi brousse, for many outsiders, epitomized the experience and essence of life in Madagascar.

By now, the only illumination came from the bus headlights. It was completely dark outside, and we did not know our whereabouts. Occasionally, faint lights in the distance hinted at human presence. It continued for several hours until we reached our first security checkpoint. The bus pulled over, joining a line of other buses and vehicles. As everyone awakened, conversations resumed, and we disembarked into the night, finding fellow passengers gathered, smoking or engaged in small talk.

I informed Augustine about the safety precautions we were taking as we entered a territory along Highway RN7 known for bandit activity. A military escort was our best defence until we reached a safer area. Despite the initial unease, it became a regular occurrence and provided a captivating sight as the winding mountain roads began. The lights of the vehicles ahead illuminated the trees, creating a beautiful scene as each headlight passed by. The lights seemed to stretch endlessly along the mountain we had just traversed. Most passengers had returned to sleep, oblivious to this picturesque view, which had likely become second nature to them.

Augustine and I kept our voices low to avoid disturbing anyone. He shared his thoughts on the journey so far, finding the experience of being escorted by the military exciting and a reflection of the realities in Madagascar. Augustine's perspective shed light on people's varied approaches when travelling, contrasting with tourists who would avoid the night journey.

Augustine: I always travel alone, and I prefer it. It teaches me about myself and what it means to be alive. There is danger even in places considered safe, but we often pretend it doesn't exist or choose not to confront it, hoping it will disappear. I've been in Mada for two weeks, starting from Diego Suarez in the north. How people live reveals a lot about their thinking, and observing how they think, followed by their actions, tells me they have a purpose.

I listened attentively, jotting down fragmented notes in my journal. We soon reached Fianarantsoa, a comforting milestone. As Mada's fourth-largest city, it marked the straightforward travel westward along RN7 to the coastal town of Tulear. Glancing at my watch for the first time; it read half past two

in the morning. True to form, a roadside restaurant near the station welcomed tired travellers seeking solace at this late hour.

Switching on my mobile, I received texts from Malala, Nicolas, and Narindra. Replying to them, I shared the news that I had safely passed the supposed bridge collapse at Antisrabe and reached the halfway point. It felt like a personal challenge, a testament to my determination against the scepticism of the Gasy people, who doubted my willingness to take risks like this night's journey. Additionally, throughout these travels, I remained disconnected from the internet, unable to communicate with anyone outside Madagascar. Augustine also remarked on this, emphasizing how we often assign undue value to certain things, like the internet, when they hold little significance in the grand scheme of our lives. Before we left the bus to stretch our limbs, he gave me a final statement: "Forget what you already know and begin to learn what they know. I believe that will bring you closer to them."

As we continued our westward progress, the passengers became more awake and resumed their conversations. The music still played, keeping sleep at bay for most of them. Along the way, we witnessed numerous forest fires and the slash-and-burn farming method, creating an illuminated display akin to crop circles in the distance. The glowing orange horizon offered a glimmer of light in the darkness. Still, slash and burn raised complex social and economic issues, adding to the intricate fabric of Madagascar's society. Augustine remained silent, seemingly indifferent to the spectacle, lost in his spiritual thoughts.

Augustine: Tourists might perceive these fires as representing dangerous, ignorant, and backward people, but those who engage in this practice understand its purpose. They may be aware of the destruction it causes to the soil and ecosystem, yet if you grew up here, you would not question it, right?

Me: It's our responsibility to engage in dialogue, share our knowledge, and help improve systems without disrupting the local worldview.

Augustine: I understand your point, but our mere presence here has caused disruption. We cannot change that almost every corner of the globe is known; perhaps we should respect and silently observe as we pass through places that are not our own. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

Me: I think I do. It might explain why you find solace in the silence during morning meditation.

Augustine: That is part of the reason. In silence, you are free to travel with your senses, allowing all stimuli to enter your mind and let the energy flow move freely within you. That's why I travel alone

and seek the spirituality of people and places. It is where their true essence lies, where you discover how they perceive the world around them.

I slept for the remainder of the night and awoke at daybreak. The delicate balance between light and dark greeted me, and the sun also seemed to be rising. Glancing at Augustine, he was sound asleep, as were most other travellers, except for a lady in the front munching on bananas. The loud and upbeat Malagasy pop music had faded away, replaced by a quiet ambience. I noticed only one taxi brousse ahead, and the troupe of vehicles we had seen earlier had vanished during my sleep. I awaited the next sign indicating our location, and it read Sakaraha, one of the gemstone trading towns. We had already passed Ranohira, where I would return after my brief stay in Tulear. Judging by this, I knew we were a few hours away from our destination. The night journey had been pleasant, with minimal interruptions. Augustine had been a soothing and tranquil companion. I anticipated reaching Tulear directly, with few to no stops, as it was a quarter to five in the morning. The surroundings were empty, adorned by the jagged Karst formations of the Isalo escarpment and vast arid plains stretching as far as the eye could see. They were broken only by sporadic towns along the RN7 with their semi-urban concrete structures.

Meeting Augustine was a unique experience that gave me a glimpse into a different type of traveller, one I describe as a post-tourist. Unlike many tourists I encountered during my ethnographic entries, Augustine travelled alone, seeking a deeper connection with the places and people he encountered. His approach was rooted in silence, observation, and spiritual exploration, allowing him to immerse himself in the essence of his explored destinations truly.

Augustine's perspective challenged the notion of imposing our knowledge and disrupting local worldviews. Instead, he believed in respecting and silently observing, acknowledging our presence alone's impact on a place. His emphasis on understanding how people connect with their environment and themselves revealed a profound understanding of cultural perception and a willingness to learn from the locals. Augustine's approach as a post-tourist exemplified a mindful and reflective way of travelling, reminding me of the importance of embracing silence, observation, and the intrinsic wisdom within the places we visit.

Tulear

"Prof. Barthelemy: Granting me into the Realm of the Bara"

Professor Barthelemy, the director of Archaeology at the University of Tulear and the CEDRATOM museum, played a crucial role in my fieldtrips into the Bara world. His efficient demeanour and concise responses always left an impression. Whenever I visited Tulear, I would visit the museum to meet with him and discuss my progress and research direction.

During one of our encounters, I informed him of my intention to approach my research differently. He expressed mild bemusement, explaining that the Bara had already revealed themselves to me in many ways, and my task now was to rediscover those aspects. He emphasized the importance of specificity in my questions to delve deeper into the Bara culture. As an anthropologist, I understood that socio-cultural research demanded active probing and finding trustworthy sources within the community.

Prof. Barthelemy always gave me an official letter granting research permission, my gateway into the Bara world. He humorously asked me to print it out, even though he had a working printer beside his laptop. His support and guidance were invaluable as I embarked on my exploration of the Bara culture.

"Joanna - Embracing Spontaneity and Immersion into the Local Fabric"

Before my journey to Bara country, I encountered Joanna, a solo traveller seeking random adventures during her free time. With nothing planned, she invited me to join her on an impromptu excursion, which I gladly accepted. Joanna, hailing from Reading, England, was no stranger to backpacking and exploring the world. When asked about her motivations for travelling this way, she shared her mantra of "travelling to feel." Each journey ignited a unique emotion within her, making it difficult to put into words. Our shared experience was not just about filling a blank day on her itinerary but about immersing herself in the local tapestry of life.

Unlike many tourists who view the taxi brousse as a bucket list item, Joanna saw it as an opportunity to get closer to the authentic fabric of local existence. She believed that it was in these shared spaces where locals engaged in genuine conversations about their lives. Together, we decided to venture to St. Augustine, a coastal town with historical significance. However, upon arrival, we discovered the absence of other tourists and limited accommodations. Undeterred, we sought a way to return, engaging with the locals who informed us that the impending storm would impede our departure. Accepting our situation, we sat down to reflect and discuss our possibly thwarted excursion.

Joanna: In situations like this, you discover something about yourself and others. Compassion is an innate quality we all possess, and someone here will help us. You'll see. I wasn't worried in the slightest. Being stranded in St. Augustine wouldn't disrupt my plans significantly, but it posed a challenge for Joanna, who had booked her travels to go farther north from Tulear the next day. As we observed the local activities near the coast, Joanna remarked on the helpfulness of the Malagasy people. They always try to assist, even if it may take some time. I shared the adage I've collected during my time in Madagascar: "In Mada, there is always a way." Joanna smiled, reassured that we would find a solution. By late afternoon, the winds had shifted, making the sea impassable. With no bus available, we sought options and tried the only hostel in town, but the taxi offered was too expensive for us. We approached locals, sharing our concerns and receiving either laughter or empathetic responses. It seemed luck wasn't on our side, but I've learned that fortune often comes when you're on the verge of giving up.

News travelled fast in the small town, and a local informed us that we could hitch a ride with a Christian missionary school heading back to Tulear. Gratefully accepting, we hopped into the back of their truck. Bumps and bangs didn't dampen our spirits as we arrived in Tulear. The driver insisted on our gratitude and requested nothing more than our continued enjoyment of the songs we clapped along to throughout the journey. Walking back to our hotel, we marvelled at the vibrant music permeating the streets of Tulear. It felt like a walking disco, with music blaring from small huts. Felix, a familiar face, was waiting outside, handling the transactions with Vazaha (foreigners), as he called them. Although my excursions in Tulear would have to wait, Apollo and I were set for an early morning to start the next day to continue my fieldwork back to Beronono village.

Encountering Joanna amidst my ethnographic fieldwork felt like a breath of fresh air, adding another dimension to the post-tourist assemblage I had discovered thus far. Joanna's philosophy of "travelling to feel" resonated deeply with me. She embarked on her journeys not merely to tick off destinations on a checklist but to truly immerse herself in the experiences and emotions that travel had to offer. Her willingness to embrace the unpredictable and venture into the unknown showcased a genuine curiosity and openness to discovering herself and the world around her. In Joanna, I found a fellow explorer who understood the significance of connecting with the local fabric of life and sought to go beyond surface-level tourist attractions. Our shared moments of uncertainty and ultimate triumph in returning to Tulear were a testament to the innate compassion and resilience of the Malagasy people and ourselves. Through Joanna's perspective, I gained a deeper appreciation for the transformative power of travel and the invaluable lessons apprehended when we dare to step outside our comfort zones.

Ranohira

As twilight blanketed the landscape, I found myself in Ranohira, where tourists sought refuge in their selected hotels. At the same time, the local hostels quietly awaited their guests, hidden from the pages of popular guidebooks and the recommendations of travel reviewers. In this obscure corner of Ranohira, Apollo had graciously extended an invitation to stay at his aunt's house, a gesture I appreciated, yet my curiosity led me elsewhere. Drawn by the allure of the Chez Alice boys, I embarked on a separate path, knowing that our destinies would intertwine once again when the sun graced the horizon the following day. In the embrace of the night, Ranohira whispered tales of both the known and the undiscovered, offering a glimpse into the enchanting tapestry that awaited my eager exploration.

"Crossing Cultural Perspectives: A Meeting with Antoine"

As I found myself amidst the bittersweet ambience of Chez Alice, a collection of bungalows nestled within the captivating scenery, a moment of reflection enveloped me. I was drawn to the distant horizon where Isalo National Park blazed under the night sky. The mesmerizing visual spectacle was juxtaposed with the sobering reality of the forest's destruction. Memories of the fires encountered during my travel with Augustine resurfaced, reminding me of the seemingly commonplace nature of such occurrences across the island. Although a few tourists dined indoors, I couldn't help but

contemplate the potential fate that awaited the Makay region, hoping it would not share the same destiny.

At that moment, Antoine, attuned to my presence, approached the terrace with a cheerful demeanour as if he had anticipated my arrival. Our conversation began, and I updated him on my experiences and events in Bara country. While Antoine's father resided in France, managing the hotel complex fell upon him during his mother Alice's intermittent absences. Compliance was his approach to the responsibility thrust upon him, finding solace in music and rum, which often formed the backdrop of nights shared by the hotel's workers and awake tourists.

As we sat in silence, both captivated by the burning horizon, I broke the silence, compelled to address the weight of the event hanging in the air, eager to uncover Antoine's thoughts.

Antoine's perspective on the forest fires sheds light on the intricate web of beliefs and motivations surrounding this destructive phenomenon. While it adversely affected tourism and the hotel's business, he revealed that locals and farmers attributed the smoke to bringing rain, an age-old belief deeply ingrained in their agricultural livelihoods. Attempting to address this issue through education must balance respecting local traditions and challenging contradictory beliefs.

Curious about the origins of the fires, I asked Antoine for his opinion on who might be responsible. He acknowledged the situation's complexity, with potential culprits ranging from farmers to officials seeking funding and attention. Moreover, he suggested that burning may be a longstanding cultural tradition passed down through generations. Determining the impact on Isalo's image and tourism proved challenging, as tourists still frequented the area despite these incidents.

Given Antoine's familiarity with the Malagasy and Vazaha perspectives, I sought his insight on the Bara people I had encountered in Ranohira and their representativeness of Bara culture. Having spent much of his adolescence in France, Antoine understood my query and took a moment to formulate his response. He conveyed that the Bara in Ranohira, being more connected to highways and exposed to a diverse range of outsiders, had adapted their ways to accommodate this diversity. In contrast, the Bara living more profoundly in the region's interior maintained a more traditional lifestyle and worldview, unencumbered by the need to adapt. Economic incentives and a desire for a higher standard of living often drove individuals to embrace change, resulting in a stark contrast between the Bara in Ranohira and those in villages like Beronono I had previously encountered.

My connection with Antoine deepened over time, rooted in the authenticity of our interactions. From the moment we first met at Chez Alice, where I explored Bara Shamanic culture, Antoine and Giovanni expressed surprise and wished me luck, astounded by the audacity of my endeavour. Returning to

Chez Alice weeks later, I was astonished that I had emerged unscathed from my immersive experiences in the Bara villages. This newfound respect forged a bond, granting me a sense of belonging within their circle. It allowed me the freedom to navigate the hotel and engage with the locals without hesitation or scrutiny. I had earned their endorsement to continue my research, an implicit invitation to delve deeper into their world.

As the evening progressed, tourists gradually dispersed to their bungalows, signalling the commencement of the rum-fueled musical gathering. I joined a table of fellow travellers, immersing myself in the convivial atmosphere. The backdrop of Isalo Park ablaze with fire added a surreal ambience to the evening's festivities, creating an opportune moment to casually converse with the tourists, subtly weaving my inquiries into the fabric of the occasion.

Eventually, Giovanni joined our table, diverting my attention from collecting perspectives to embracing the joyous atmosphere fully. Antoine and another local musician strummed Malagasy tunes on their guitars, captivating the crowd. Fatigue crept in, exacerbated by the lingering effects of the arduous journey to Ranohira. In my vulnerable state, Giovanni generously replenished my glass with rum, a customary libation intertwined with Bara socializing and rituals. Giovanni once said, "To learn about the Bara, one must first learn to drink rum." Thus, the nights at Chez Alice unfolded, blending the conviviality of social customs with the pursuit of knowledge.

Meeting Antoine and conversing with him has added complexity to my understanding of the touristic impacts on the Bara people. Initially, I believed that tourists would refrain from bringing about changes and adaptations in the local culture, if the Bara would conform to the needs and expectations of visitors. However, Antoine's insights challenged this perspective. Through his experiences and observations, he highlighted the distinction between the Bara living in well-connected towns and cities, influenced by frequent interactions with outsiders, and those residing in more remote villages, who have preserved their traditional lifestyle and worldview. Antoine's explanation emphasized the influence of external factors, economic opportunities, and the natural inclination of individuals to adapt to change. The situation was far more nuanced than my initial understanding. This encounter with Antoine has compelled me to reconsider the intricate dynamics between tourism and cultural preservation, urging me to delve deeper into the complexities of the Bara community and their interactions with the tourist industry.

"A Conservationist's Perspective: Conversing with Alena"

The following day, I found myself back at the familiar terrace of Chez Alice, observing the early morning routines of the guests. Among them was Alena, fixated on the charred horizon of Isalo National Park.

Alena shared her purpose for being in Madagascar: to photograph the landscapes she had missed during her previous visit. Cultural immersion held little interest for her and her husband; their focus was solely on nature.

As a conservationist, Alena expressed her disappointment in the situation. She had learned from a local tour guide that Isalo National Park no longer shared its proceeds with the community. In contrast, a community park had emerged as a competitor, offering lower prices and ensuring that profits were shared locally. It led Alena to believe that the forest fires were not solely a matter of socio-cultural practices but also political implications.

Considering her conservationist perspective, I questioned Alena about the impact of competing interests on the destruction of landscapes. She believed that livelihoods and traditions should not contradict the preservation of natural beauty. In her view, both aspects should harmoniously coexist. They led her to lean towards a political explanation for the burning of the park rather than purely socio-cultural motives.

Alena's perspective resonated with me and echoed the sentiments of locals and visitors in the Bara region. Our conversation continued until Apollo interrupted, informing me of a meeting he had arranged with a relative who worked as a tour guide in the Makay. It was a piece of good news amidst the ongoing exploration.

Alena's singular focus on capturing the beauty of nature through her photography may have initially portrayed her as disconnected from the cultural and social aspects of the places she visited. However, her conversation revealed a deeper understanding and awareness. While her primary motivation was to document the landscapes, she recognized the importance of acknowledging and respecting the local community's role in preserving and nurturing these natural environments. Alena's recognition that the landscapes she admired are tangent with the people's lives, traditions, and livelihoods reminded her of the significance of community connections and the need for responsible and sustainable practices. Her realization highlighted the importance of appreciating not only the aesthetics of nature but also the meaningful associations and relationships.

"The Insights of Francis: Perspectives on Tourism and the Bara Community"

Francis's unique perspective challenged my preconceived notions and expanded my understanding of the local community in Ranohira. As I walked through the town, I witnessed the bustling main square where tour guides and townsfolk congregated, temporarily sidelined due to the closure of Isalo National Park. Francis, with his warm smile and accompanied by his family, exemplified the hospitality of the Bara people. Over lunch, we delved into discussions about tourism, the role of the MNP, and the challenges faced by the community.

Francis shed light on the complexities of the situation, pointing out that the burning of forests was not solely for subsistence reasons but also a result of the MNP's lack of support for the local community. He expressed concern about the increasing number of tour guides and the potential oversaturation of the market, exacerbated by the tourists' desire for lower prices and quick results. Lacking proper regulation and a centralized body to manage the situation, transparency and coherence in the tourism industry were compromised.

This sentiment resonated not only with Francis but also with other tour guides at Chez Alice. They shared worries about the need for more transparency from official actors, which led to a division in approaches and mentalities regarding tourism services. Amidst the conversation, Francis remarked on the world's interconnectedness, emphasizing that despite limited technological infrastructure, they were aware of global events. He highlighted the misconception that outsiders often bring, expecting to witness a vastly different way of life when in reality, people worldwide engage in similar activities with their unique cultural variations.

In discussing tourism, Francis touched upon the commercialization and commodification of movement, emphasizing that tourists often monetize aspects of the local community's life, from cultural practices to landscapes. This realization prompted contemplation on the potential misrepresentation or misleading nature of tourism.

Francis's insights provided a deeper understanding of the local community's perspective and the intricate dynamics in the tourism industry. It served as a reminder to approach cultural immersion and exploration respectfully, acknowledging the significance and nuances of the local way of life.

In our conversation, I inquired about Francis's perspective on tourism, wondering if it was unwelcome in Ranohira. He clarified that it wasn't a matter of being unwelcome but rather a desire for a different approach to sharing their culture with outsiders. While recognizing tourism's economic benefits, many

locals feel inhibited and restricted in their authentic Malagasy and Bara way of life. Francis emphasized that tourism needs to acknowledge the true essence of its impact.

As Francis delved into his thoughts, I found myself intrigued and excited by our philosophical dialogue about the nature of tourism in the area. He expressed his belief that the world is increasingly interconnected, exemplified by my presence there. However, he stressed the importance of recognizing the individuals who make these connections work—the tour guides, porters, cleaners, and other workers. While organizations and agencies may appear to drive tourism, in Francis's view, it is the people on the ground who are the ones truly responsible for its success.

Francis's insights highlighted the tension between the economic benefits of tourism and the desire to preserve the authentic local way of life. It was a thought-provoking conversation that underscored the complex dynamics inherent in the relationship between tourism and the community.

Globalization and its complexities

Globalization encompasses economic, social, cultural, and political activities that transcend national boundaries—studied through different theoretical lenses, including neo-Marxism, dependent development, and imperialism. Anthropologists like Clifford (1997:7) emphasize the need to consider local and transnational influences, using concepts like "trans-local" to comprehend these complex processes.

Contemporary globalization has intensified and accelerated, compressing time and space, according to David Harvey (1989:240). While mobility has always existed, globalization now includes regulatory structures that can hinder movement, create exclusion, and foster disconnection. The benefits of globalization are mainly accessible to those with resources, leading to social closure and reinforcing existing economic and social hierarchies.

Contrary to the notion of seamless flows, Ferguson (2006:47) argues that globalization operates selectively, connecting specific points while excluding spaces in between. Global ideas circulate through various media, generating vernacular forms of globalization and triggering resistance, selectivity, and agency. Circulation is a cultural process influenced by interactions between specific states and interpretative communities.

Tourism experiences are shaped by circulating contents that create myths and narratives, aligning with cultural meta-narratives of exploration, adventure, and intercultural relations. People play a vital role in tourism, as the global project relies on human interactions. Anthropologists move beyond simple impact studies, examining imagery, power dynamics, performance, and meaning in the construction of tourist sites. This interdisciplinary approach connects global politics with micro-practices and political economy with semiotics.

Observing the town from Francis' balcony, I asked him about his role in tourism, particularly concerning the Makay. He explained that he is a driver and works with Pierre Nambo, driving tourists to the Makay and occasionally participating in the tours. Intrigued, I wanted to delve deeper into the topic, as understanding the Makay and its tourism venture held personal significance for me.

Francis expressed concern about the weak management and structure of the Makay tourism operation, fearing it might suffer the same fate as Isalo. To address this, he shared his plans to establish his organization for running tours to the Makay. Pointing to the centre of attention, Francis highlighted that with Isalo Park closed, the Makay Massif becomes an attractive alternative. However, he noted that the Makay currently relies on word-of-mouth and local collection points in Ranohira, needing an official setup or website for promotion.

I inquired whether Pierre Nambo would be present, to which Francis responded that it was unnecessary. The locals already know how to profit from the Makay. If they find tourists interested in visiting, they receive a small fee, while the rest goes to the existing setup by Pierre Nambo and the Makay Association in Beronono. It exemplifies the interconnected links between different frameworks that locals create to benefit and profit collectively.

Francis concluded by mentioning that if he drives tourists to the Makay, he would inform me of the development.

I didn't push Francis further on his plan to establish his organization for the Makay, but I noticed the potential of the Makay extending beyond Beronono and Nature Evolution. It seemed like the Makay could become a prominent tourism destination in Madagascar, and this might be the early stages of that process.

Despite the responsibilities of providing for his family, Francis displayed motivation, drive, and a willingness to seize opportunities. He emphasized that he had taught himself everything he knew after high school, and I admired his ability to articulate his thoughts.

During one of our final sessions together, Francis was performing maintenance on his truck while I had the opportunity to engage with him. He encountered a minor issue with the engine, and I confessed my lack of knowledge in that area. Francis chuckled, but I wasn't joking. He expressed that learning is crucial for success and survival in life, and I agreed with him but clarified that wanting to help doesn't always mean having the ability to do so.

Francis explained that understanding the engine required the proper perspective and attitude, and once you follow the logic, it becomes clear. His words prompted me to contemplate the questions I sought to answer in my research within the tourism framework. Before I could delve further into my thoughts, Francis focused on my mental state and continued the conversation.

Francis provided an insightful perspective, questioning how other Vazaha (foreigners) see me as a Vazaha in Madagascar. He suggested that I may be more connected to the Malagasy culture than some locals who seek validation through the Vazaha. It made me reflect on who is studying whom in the presence of both Malagasy and tourists.

This perspective reminded me of a powerful experience with the tourist gaze, where I became an object of fascination for tourists. During a trip to Beronono village with Apollo, we squeezed into an overcrowded local transport truck that could barely accommodate all the passengers. As we embarked on the journey, the truck stopped at a gas station to refuel before the gruelling 13-hour dirt road ahead.

While we were stuck inside the truck, unable to move due to the cramped conditions, a clean and impressive mini-coach pulled up next to us. Tourists emerged from the coach, fresh and energetic, equipped with cameras and mobile phones. They circled us, capturing images of our suffering and commenting on them. Once they were satisfied, they returned to the mini-coach and left.

This moment exemplified the objectification I experienced as a local attraction for tourists. It highlighted the power dynamics of the tourist gaze and its impact on the local community.

During that experience, I felt a mix of normalcy and a subtle sense of shame. I didn't view this mode of travel as inferior, but rather the tourists' disregard for our humanity while they snapped away. They didn't acknowledge us or offer a simple greeting. I questioned whether this was the true nature of the tourist gaze in its most naive and abusive form.

It threw me into the perspective of being an object, a tourist selling point. Our cramped conditions, exhaustion, and lack of freedom created a unique and spectacular "travelling spectacle" for them. The

locals, who had no choice but to use this transport, acknowledged the suffering that came with it. We endured it because we had no other option.

Francis pointed out that the host/guest binary doesn't indeed exist. The term "Vazaha" is not solely based on nationality, ethnicity, or skin colour but reminds us of our differing perspectives. As the travels on the road ended, I pondered how I would approach the return to Beronono village. I hoped to gain new insights by asking different questions and coming to the experience from a fresh perspective. Above all, I aimed to follow the logic and remain open to whatever unfolded each day.

Reflecting on my experiences with Francis, a local driver in Madagascar, I appreciated his insightful views on tourism and the notion of being a "Vazaha" (foreigner). Francis challenges the assumption that being a Vazaha automatically makes one an outsider, highlighting the potential for shared understanding among diverse individuals.

Francis's observations on the tourist gaze shed light on the power dynamics. When I recounted an incident where tourists photographed locals in a cramped transport without acknowledging their humanity, it raised questions about ethics and the need for respectful interactions.

His concerns about tourism management in the Makay region have broader implications for the Bara community, as weak management may hinder the area's potential. Francis's aspirations to establish his organization demonstrate the drive for community empowerment.

Francis's insights call for a nuanced understanding of tourism's impact on the Bara people. By critically examining the dynamics of the tourist gaze and promoting respectful engagement, we can foster a more equitable and mutually beneficial tourism experience for visitors and the Bara community.

6

THE RETURN

My fieldwork takes me back to the heart of Bara country, starting from Ranohira and heading north until reaching Beronono. Typically, there is a midway stop at Beroroha, unless one travels by 4x4, which allows for a straight 13-hour drive from Ranohira to Beronono. While returning to Bara country and exploring the Makay region, I continuously collect local narratives, immersing myself in the people's experiences.

Beroroha

Beroroha, one of the larger towns in Bara country, serves as a midpoint between Ranohira and the Beronono village. I stayed with Apollo's parents on this visit, who welcomed me warmly and supported

my fieldwork. I formed friendships with many inhabitants of the village compound, and the elders were friendly and receptive to my presence. During my stay in Beroroha, I attended a wedding initiation ceremony, which indicated that I was gradually transitioning from a researcher/Vazaha status to becoming more known and integrated within Bara country. Mr Lucien, the former mayor of Beroroha, shared a similar role to Professor Barthelemy deep within Bara country. Through my multiple stays in Beroroha, I connected with various individuals and witnessed their activities, thanks to my association with Mr Lucien. He now worked as a teacher at the local high school, where Paul Tafara, brother of Piere Nambo, also served as a teacher.

"Crossing Paths: An Encounter with Paul Tafara in the Bara Country"

I met Paul Tafara at his home, where his wife greeted us and asked us to wait for Paul's return. The houses were arranged in rectangular shapes, lined up one after another. Electricity was unavailable in

every household except for a few with generators to overcome the frequent blackouts. Paul Tafara, however, rarely used electricity, so we sat in a dimly lit communal room.

Paul entered the room with a sense of knowing. It seemed he had anticipated my visit and greeted me with a handshake. We had crossed paths before when Nicolas accompanied me, but this was our first meeting in his humble home. Our conversation revolved around the situation in the Makay region, setting aside the traditional topics of divination and the sacredness of the Makay Massif and its cave paintings.

Paul began by emphasizing that Nature Evolution members were the primary outsiders who frequented the caves and the Makay complex for research purposes. The numbers were gradually increasing in terms of regular tourists, and this was something the Beronono Bara community aimed to improve significantly. When discussing the authority surrounding the Makay, Paul eagerly highlighted that the Beronono Bara held the predominant control and ownership over these sites.

The Makay complex holds sacred significance, with burial sites scattered throughout. The area's current inhabitants respect their traditions and customs, refraining from further utilization of the Makay sites. In the past, herders sought shelter in the caves and made charcoal drawings, but there was no evidence of such pictures in Mahatigny Cave during my visit. Since Dr Erik Gonthier's request to protect the sites from further use or contamination, the Beronono Bara community has become more vigilant in safeguarding the Makay sites from outsiders and locals. While they cannot monitor every area, they are proactive in preserving them.

The main entrance to the Makay is through Beronono village, as the north route is challenging and rarely used by locals due to the Malaso, a known issue in the area. Paul stepped outside to smoke, and we followed him, accompanied by wandering pigs and chickens. As I observed the surroundings, Apollo wandered off, leaving me feeling out of place in the ensuing silence. To break the silence, I joined Paul on a log, and he warmly smiled at me, making me feel at ease.

I took the opportunity to inquire about the security of the Makay and Bara lands in general, which inevitably involved the Malaso phenomenon. The Ombiassa, a key component of Malaso, was a topic I had previously discussed with Paul during my earlier visit with Nicolas. This time, my concern shifted towards the safety of tourists and how the Malaso phenomenon might intersect with the development of the Makay complex as a tourist destination in Bara lands.

Paul acknowledged the issue with Malaso, affirming that no one would deny its presence. He explained that the tradition would persist as long as the Ombiassa continued their rituals and practices associated with Malaso. Regarding the impact on tourists, Paul couldn't comment extensively. Still, he

believed that since the primary objective of Malaso was to steal Zebu (cattle), outsiders were not in harm's way. He expressed confidence that as people began to benefit from tourism and recognized its value, they would work together to protect it, and the Malaso would refrain from creating issues with tourists.

Intrigued by his perspective, I wondered why the Malaso would not exploit tourists as they do with Zebu. Paul saw tourists as an additional layer of security. He used my nationality as an example, explaining that if anything were to happen to me, the news would reach the authorities and prompt investigation by the British Embassy. This kind of international attention would not bode well for the long-term existence of the Malaso, and they were aware of the potential interference posed by tourists. Thus, the status quo had to be maintained, and the intelligent Ombiassa understood this dynamic.

In Paul's explanation, I sensed that he held more knowledge than he shared with me. While my mind might have exaggerated my thoughts, I agreed with his perspective on the potential impact of tourism on the Malaso situation. Paul argued that if the Makay complex could reach its full potential as an attraction, it would create job opportunities and allow people to acquire new skills. It would discourage young individuals from resorting to the Malaso to earn income. Instead, they would pursue education and benefit from the new opportunities emerging from the Makay venture. Creating genuine opportunities for people to make an honest living was seen as a way to address the issue of Malaso and overall security.

Taking a risk, I slipped in one more question, aware of the delicate balance between appropriate and bothersome inquiries. Despite my previous conversations, I was still adjusting to the direct nature of my queries compared to the spontaneous flow of dialogue.

Me: Concerning the Malaso, what would be my positionality? Am I considered a tourist, researcher, friend, or acquaintance?

Paul: Let me put it this way. Generally, we see two types of Vazaha: 1) Foreigners who are outsiders, much like yourself, who can be here for various reasons, and 2) Vazaha as an authority, mainly government officials, tied to corruption. So, you can position yourself wherever you fit best as a Vazaha. We need to distinguish between the Malaso and our Bara traditions. The Malaso activity is a foreign influence that is not easy to understand but linked to corrupt practices that deviate from the Bara way of doing things.

I wondered if Paul's response was a direct answer or a polite expression of slight annoyance. However, he felt the need to comment on my rapid notetaking, offering a smile of approval and acknowledging

it as a fine skill. Apollo rejoined us, breaking the silence, and sat beside me. This time, I felt content in the quiet, allowing it to wash over me as I reached for a cigarette.

"Voices of the Bara: Indigenous Storytelling and Cultural Invention"

In my exploration of the Makay region, I found myself in a unique position as a "Lone Ethnographer" (Rosaldo, 1989) and a tourist simultaneously. It allowed me to fluidly navigate between the roles of archaeologists, tourists, and anthropologists, gaining insights from both local perspectives and external viewpoints. The Bara people, particularly the Beronono Bara, asserted their autonomy in preserving and sharing their history, conducting their indigenous archaeology and anthropology. Through casual stories known as Tapasiry, the Bara expressed their cultural narratives, emphasizing the significance of oral tradition over ritual texts (Huntington, 1978).

My experiences with the Bara community and discussions with Apollo, who is also studying anthropology, provided opportunities for comparative analysis and discussions on methodological approaches. While critics argue that insiders may struggle to detach from their cultural understandings and communicate effectively, and outsiders may face challenges in gaining trust, our combined perspectives allowed for a blend of insider and outsider insights (Messerschmidt, 1981b; Forster, 2012; Duranti, 1997; Aguilar, 1981).

It is important to note that the distinction between "native" and "non-native" anthropologists are complex, and factors such as ethnicity play only one role in navigating community dynamics (Narayan, 1993; Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Perley, 2011). The Bara's pride, wisdom, and cleverness, veiled in simplicity and humor, resonated with my evolving understanding of their culture (Huntington, 1978).

Overall, my experiences with Paul Tafara and the Bara community contribute to the broader discussions in my ethnography on indigenous tourism, culture loss, and the intricate dynamics of conducting anthropological research in one's community.

In their connection to the Makay region, the Bara people engage in their own storytelling and familial history. They perceive archaeological sites not as static remnants of the past but as living and present entities. Through their folktales, known as "Tapasiry," the Bara establish meaning in the present and claim their historicity, legitimizing the present while allowing for flexibility and reinterpretation (Marshall, 2002; Huntington, 1978).

The concept of indigeneity raises debates surrounding indigenous claims to heritage and rights. Some argue that indigenous knowledge and practices are seen as a rebranding of the primitive, while others criticize indigenous cultures romanticized and outdated visions (Kuper, 2003). The reliability and historical value of oral traditions and indigenous narratives raise questions, emphasizing the importance of considering the perspectives of those who tell them (Brody, 2001)

The interpretation of indigenous archaeological claims and rights faces similar reservations and debates (McGhee, 2008). Working with indigenous communities affected by capitalism and colonialism is a critical archaeological research perspective (Murray, 2011).

The Bara, observe strict adherence to ancestral traditions and the teller influences the cultural invention (Luigi's memoirs, 1941; Graeber, 2007). While cultural imperialism plays a role in inventing traditions for subordinate people, the Bara's relationship with tradition is more nuanced and intertwined with political dynamics in Madagascar (Fabian, 1983; Ranger, 1983; Said, 1978). The concept of power is tentative and elusive in Bara country, with villagers playing with the façade of state power (Graeber, 2007).

The recollection of memory serves as part of the cultural creation paradigm, as seen in the Arapium and Jaraqui communities in the lower Amazon, Brazil, where collective historical memories and territorial meanings shape their indigenous identities (Bolanos, 2010). Similarly, the Bara display their historicity through storytelling and routine, emphasizing the importance of narratives in understanding their scientific practice (Haraway, 1989).

Ethnographic research inevitably involves cultural invention, as the ethnographer holds authority in capturing cultural facets (Cohn, 1980; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Much of the Bara's data and knowledge reside in conversations, shared experiences, and storytelling, aligning with indigenous ways of knowing based on oral traditions (Kovach, 2010). Storytelling, re-storying, and talk-story are recognized methods in indigenous research (Thomas, 2005; Bishop, 1999; Absolon & Willet, 2004).

Understanding the relationships between the Bara, the Makay, and tourists relied on engaging with interlocutors and individuals, shaping the researcher's understanding of knowledge construction and indigenous orientations to theory (Wilson, 2001; Kirby et al., 2006).

A Price to Pay: Navigating the Bara Way in Madagascar

The saying "In Mada there is always a way" resonated as we faced the challenge of planning our journey from Beroroha to Beronono without transportation. Our solution is a 16-hour trek on foot, with Paul Tafara's son as our guide. The news brought relief, and we had two days to spend in Beroroha before setting off.

Apollo had taken care of arrangements and fees, but I could not help feeling a hint of suspicion whenever money was involved. Nevertheless, I trusted that everything was handled in good faith.

As we awaited our departure, we attended a wedding ceremony that was more of a celebration of the agreed-upon terms between the parties. In a dimly lit room, segregated by gender, I tried to blend into the darkness, but occasional glances in my direction reminded me of my presence.

A widowed woman caught my eye, smiling in the hopes of receiving a smile in return. I obliged politely but soon excused myself from the room, seeking solace on the patio. The air was thick with the scent of rum, and I knew it was customary to partake. Reluctantly, I sipped the strong liquor, which left my stomach unsettled. Thankfully, Apollo provided support as we returned home, arm in arm.

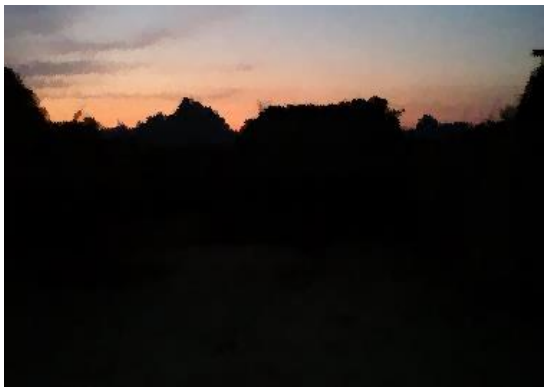
Awakening two hours late, I found Apollo waiting in the chair, perhaps patiently or merely passing the time. He had news to share: Paul Tafara's son could no longer accompany us due to a payment dispute. My immediate concern was what to do next, but the sudden cancellation by our supposed friend lingered in the air. Apollo explained that this may have been a ploy to exploit tourists who willingly hand out money, inadvertently creating such situations. I sat in silence, grappling with acceptance and a sense of betrayal.

As Apollo left the room, a sinking feeling engulfed me. The reality of the situation sank in, and doubts arose about our trip back to Beronono. Frustration plagued my thoughts until Sey came to the rescue. We would chariot cart our way with the help of trusted Zebu. Tomorrow, we marked our departure from Beroroha, bidding farewell to the town.

Recalling Narindra's poetic expression, "Every problem has a solution, and if there is no solution, then there is no problem," I could not help but wonder what transpired during Apollo's absence. In Madagascar, there always seems to be a way, albeit with the potential risk of being deceived and the temporary loss of trust, especially with Apollo.

The Trek to Beronono: Embracing the Unexpected

Previous expeditions from Beroroha to Beronono were meticulously planned, with reliable transportation and familiar faces. However, this time, Apollo took charge, adding an element of unpredictability to the expedition. Accompanied by new Bara companions, I anticipated fresh stories and a unique perspective of Bara country. All that remained was a restful night's sleep.



In the morning, the air carried an ashy taste from the previous night's fire, leaving behind fading smoke. As I approached the gathering outside the hut, a young man diligently worked on the cart, while clambering sounds filled the air. It was still dark at 4:20 am, and we eagerly waited to set off on our voyage.

Adrian, a lively individual, immediately engaged with me in Gasy, leaving me bemused. His enthusiasm revolved around my participation, and he playfully mentioned the challenges we would face, suggesting I stick with him for a smoother experience. Apollo and the others chuckled, revealing that I might be the subject of Adrian's jest. Apollo reassured me that aside from some leg pains the next day, there was no genuine other concern. A single woman, unattached, accompanied our group, while one of the male companions attempted to entertain her with little success. Sey emerged into view and informed us that we would depart as soon as

the first light appeared. The preparations were almost ready save for the final hammering of a nail on the cartwheel. Moreover, Sey passed around a bottle of rum, a prelude to our voyage.

Through the early morning light, we ventured into a verdant forest unlike any I had seen in Bara country. The sun's rays danced upon the leaves, casting a kaleidoscope of colours on the ground below. The air teemed with the symphony of insects and birds, accompanied by the gentle flow of nearby streams. Canopied paths guided our way while the rhythmic clanking of the zebu cart broke the natural harmony. This breathtaking environment gave me a deep sense of awe and appreciation.

Walking in pairs, we immersed ourselves in this ethereal landscape. The distant calls of what I believed to be Sifaka Lemurs echoed in every direction, seamlessly blending into the surroundings. Being present in this environment was enough; it was a sensory and visual delight that surpassed any other experience in Madagascar.

After nearly three hours of walking, we reached a small village comprising only six houses. The villagers kindly offered us coffee, which we gratefully accepted before resuming our travel. The conversation was minimal, and the early hour ensured a peaceful silence prevailed. Observing my surroundings, I noticed the elevated vantage point we had reached. Forests extended in all directions, occasionally interrupted by distant slopes and hills. The density of the foliage obscured any distant view of villages or structures.

Adrian took on the role of the primary conversationalist, albeit mainly in Gasy. The rest of the group conserved their energy, occasionally humming in agreement with Adrian's words. Whenever we encountered streams, we refreshed ourselves by wetting our faces, necks, and backs. Adrian, in his playful manner, often flicked water towards others, seemingly trying to spare us the effort. Gradually, we distanced ourselves from his antics, seeking our spots along the streambanks.

Despite the captivating beauty of Bara country's interior, the trek inevitably brought fatigue and exhaustion. The relentless sun beat down upon us, intensifying the heat. Thoughts of lunch consumed our minds as we searched for a clearing in the forest to set up a fire and rest—the Bara people, resourceful as ever, crafted cooking tools from bamboo sticks found in the wilderness. Adrian took charge of lunch preparations while Sey tended to the zebu cart.

Once we halted for lunch, the zebu's were led across the river to graze on greener pastures, providing them much-needed respite. Sey unloaded our belongings and revealed a prized possession—an old portable DVD player. It had been years since I had seen one, but it held significant value in this remote part of Bara country. Sey played Gasy music, setting a tranquil atmosphere. We reclined, basking in the sunlight filtering through the treetops, accompanied by the melodious songs of birds and the distant calls of the Sifaka Lemur. Our muscles relaxed, surrendering to the serene surroundings.

After devouring our meal, we gathered at the river to bathe. Initially hesitant, I joined the others, cleansing myself of the day's grime and sweat. It was a refreshing experience, albeit short-lived, as the scorching heat swiftly evaporated the water from our bodies. Soon, we resumed our travels towards Beronono.

Volambitra, a sizable village en route to Beronono, became our most extended stop, lasting nearly two hours. Vibrant and bustling, children played on patios, men engaged in lively conversations, and women did their daily tasks of gathering fruits, weaving baskets, and tending to various chores. The village's zebu cart "garage" buzzed with activity as men worked on repairing and maintaining the cart's components. From a vantage point atop a slope, I estimated the presence of over 100 houses—clearly a substantial village.

Some of our fellow travellers became momentarily out of sight as Apollo and Sey conversed with the villagers. Following Apollo, I entered one of the houses at the village's edge, where a young, muscular man awaited our presence, beckoning us to sit.

In a dimly lit house, illuminated only by the light filtering through the front door, I found myself sitting, unknowingly embarking on my first encounter with a Malaso. Apollo took the lead in conversation, assuring me, "Do not worry, Kadi, this is my cousin." My concern was minimal at that moment—I followed Apollo's lead. Soon, more people entered and took their seats. There was an unspoken curiosity directed towards me, but I did not mention my status as a Vazaha. It did not feel appropriate to broach that topic amid the prevailing tension. I lowered my head, focusing on the intricately woven mat beneath me, avoiding eye contact with those in the room. However, each time I glanced up, I found a beautiful Bara woman gazing in my direction, her eyes locked onto mine. When our gazes met, she would offer a smile. After a few instances, I mustered the courage to smile back, though I could not help but feel foolish.

Abruptly, we transitioned to another house, passing by a gathering of young men near the community hall. Inside, more Bara men were seated, and Apollo directed me to take a seat as well, a gesture I had come to anticipate. However, I needed to figure out the purpose of these visits until Apollo engaged in casual conversation and shared a few laughs. At this point, Apollo discreetly handed some money to one of the men, prompting thoughts of possible "protection money." Apollo kindly interrupted my silent contemplation, signalling our departure. Only when we were alone did Apollo enlighten me about the situation.

My ventures into Bara country had not gone unnoticed. Apollo informed me that although the Malaso generally avoid interfering with tourists, I had raised some concerns when I inquired about divination and met with Ombiassias in various villages during my previous visits. These actions had sparked suspicion among the Malaso. However, all was clarified, and my pursuits in Bara country were approved. It felt reassuring, although the idea of encountering a Malaso during my solitary moments in Bara country was undeniably daunting. The path ahead to Beronono seemed clear, but Apollo pulled me aside once more to reveal that we had already passed through several Malaso-inhabited villages unknowingly—Bemokaragna, Ankazaobo, Bely, Apolotsy, and Akiriky. I vaguely recalled passing by these villages, although none had appeared as prominent as Volambitra. In hindsight, even Beronono had its share of Malaso inhabitants, and witnessing the "protection money" exchange in Volambitra had somewhat normalized their presence to me.

The Malaso and The Zebu

In understanding the significance of the Malaso, one must first delve into the importance of their prized possession—the Zebu, also known as "Omby" in Malagasy. The Malaso's primary aim revolves around stealing Zebu, which is central in Bara life, regulating social, economic, and cultural behaviors. The Bara expression "Baralahy tsy afaky aomby" emphasizes the importance of Zebu, translating to "a man without beef is considered poor and cowardly and has no social or traditional value in society." Cattle are closely tied to marriage and affinal relationships, involving reciprocal exchanges and the symbolic value of dowries. Cattle ownership reflects trust and respect within the community, while transferring heifers solidifies relationships.

Furthermore, cattle are a socio-economic mechanism and can be sold during hardship. Protecting and guarding the cattle is of utmost importance, with traditional weapons like axes and spears used for defence. The Malaso phenomenon is a disruptive force, impacting local and national security, livelihoods, and values. Magical rituals, consultations with Ombiassas (spiritual leaders), and the use of amulets play crucial roles in the Malaso's operations. The Malaso employ various elements of combat games and hold consultations before conducting cattle raids, adhering to ancient practices that continue to this day. The unparalleled success of the Malaso is attributed to their meticulous planning and adherence to protective rituals, making their capture a rarity.

The traditional sport activity of the Malaso, as explained by Professor Barthelemy, involved the use of axes and spears, focusing on stealing a small number of Zebu without spilling Bara blood. The raid would prompt the cattle owner to challenge the pursuers, stating, "give up and go get revenge if you are a strong man," creating a cyclical phenomenon between Bara clans. However, the contemporary understanding of Malaso has shifted towards barbaric banditry, deviating from its ancestors' moral and judicial authority. The scale of Malaso groups has grown to involve hundreds of individuals, forming a network that destabilizes public order for the benefit of a few. Introducing firearms has transformed the Malaso into an organized criminal activity with economic motives. Efforts have been made to combat the Malaso phenomenon since 2012, with national debates and associations advocating for a dialogue-based social approach. However, resolving the issue will require time and education. There are "red zones" in isolated areas where the Malaso problem persists, hindering development and increasing poverty. Corruption and global policies contribute to the situation, undermining faith in authorities and demotivating the population from seeking justice. According to Professor Barthelemy, fighting against the Malaso is, in essence, a fight against corrupt authorities.

"Homecoming to Beronono: Rediscovering the Makay and its People”

On my first day back in Beronono village, greeted by aches and pains, but I knew that this place held the answers to my research questions about the Makay tourism venture. Previous visits had given me insights into the daily lives of the Bara people, allowing me to form a clearer picture. Now, with a familiar presence, I could pursue my research independently. The day's highlight was the warm welcome from my host, who expressed happiness at my return. The children were excited and offered me mango seeds, eager to play Pentaque. As I roamed the outskirts of the village, lost in my thoughts, it seemed the villagers had accepted me as a part of their lives. The following day, something was different. No one had come to wake me up as they usually did by 6:30 am, and Apollo, my hosts, and the kids were nowhere to be seen.

To my surprise, Sey was already outside my house conversing with Apollo, Alfred, and others. They asked if I had enjoyed my sleep, and I responded with a wide stretch and a gentle yawn. Sey mentioned walking in the forest after breakfast, and I gladly accepted. Alfred, however, misinterpreted my acceptance as thinking they were primitive, which led to an exciting conversation among all present. What fascinated me the most was the friendly and calm tone of the conversation, where I did not feel the pressure of being a Vazaha. Unfortunately, Sey abruptly interrupted the dialogue and insisted we head to the forest. I said goodbye to everyone and joined him on our journey.

The dynamics between me, Sey, and Apollo remained unchanged. We shared our usual humour, with me often being the target of their jokes. Our destination was the dense Toliara forest, passing through

the mountain Mandabasy, named after a Vazaha who used to live there. As we entered the forest, the vibrant sounds of insects and birds surrounded us. Willow spiders spun their webs everywhere, but Sey and Apollo paid them no mind, forging ahead without hesitation. I tread cautiously, mindful of past experiences and stories. Sey complimented my vigilance but assured me that there was no danger here. However, I began to miss the anonymity of the previous day. Apollo pointed out the Hazomoro tree, admired by Sey for its size and shape. Etched on its trunk were indecipherable letters, except for two dates: 1958 and 2017. It hinted at human presence in the forest, and I wished I could unravel the words to uncover a slice of history embedded in the Hazomoro tree.

"It seems that people do visit these woods, and the etching of '2017' on the Hazomoro tree suggests the presence of outsiders," Sey remarked, taking a seat on a fallen log in a contemplative pose. My statement received little attention until Apollo suggested that researchers might be responsible for the markings. However, I doubted that researchers alone were behind it.

"You know, we occasionally have French researchers visit the village. They teach the kids and organize games for them," Apollo revealed, deflating my expectations. I could not believe that this information had escaped me until now. Laughter erupted between Sey and me, and I could not help but let go of my irritation. "Well, now that you have stopped asking questions, I can share whatever comes to mind," Sey playfully responded. At least I now knew that there were other visitors in the village. I was determined to find out more about them.

Per our routine, we found a shaded spot near a small stream to have lunch. Our forest exploration had concluded, and the afternoon held uncharted territory.

A Village Divided: Perspectives on Makay Tourism

Exploring new angles of the Makay tourism venture led me to Maharitsy Stanislas, the Director of Beronono Village. His insights shed light on the evolving dynamics of traditional and entrepreneurial authority concerning the Makay. As I entered his house, elderly gentlemen greeted me with smiles, their meanings uncertain. I prepared my notepad with Apollo's assistance, ready to delve into the discussion.

Maharitsy expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of Makay tourism. His concern stemmed from the exclusivity of the Makay Association, led by the Nambo brothers, Paul Tafara, and Alfred. Only a few benefited from the tourism profits, while the village remained excluded. Initially, I saw merit in the association being the primary beneficiary of their initiative. However, in a village context, such disparities can lead to internal conflicts that are hard to avoid.

According to Maharitsy, the first visitor, Bernard, arrived in 1997, paying a porter 2,700 Ariary to explore the Makay. Today, tourists must pay 20,000 Ariary to the porter, 40,000 Ariary per day to the guide, a village tax of 5,000 Ariary, and a 10,000 Ariary entrance fee. These figures appeared inflated, causing discontent among villagers not affiliated with the Makay Association.

Furthermore, Maharitsy revealed that the Makay Association lacks legal regulations and formal rules, intensifying tensions and dividing the village. This absence of structure ultimately demotivates people, leading them to neglect their natural reserves. Consequently, activities such as lemur hunting and forest burning resurface, posing threats to the delicate ecosystem.

The divergent opinions on Makay tourism underscore the complex challenges faced by Beronono Village.

The room buzzed with conversations and disagreements, divided into different groups. I remained solemn, diligently jotting down my notes as the dispute unfolded. Apollo needed help to keep up with the various discussions. A momentary pause came when a lady entered, serving coffee and granting everyone a much-needed break. As she left, Maharitsy regained control of the conversation, continuing to enlighten us about the tourists.

Approximately 60 tourists visit the Makay annually, with a growing interest from tour agencies. Five different agencies offer excursions into the Makay: Papa Velot, Malagasy Tour, Ocean Adventure, Nature Evolution, and Hover Aid. According to the villagers' observations, most tourists come from

France, England, Japan, or Italy. They primarily visit for research, exploring chemistry, biodiversity, geology, and archaeology.

Curious about the impact of past tourists on the people of Beronono, I interjected, wondering if their presence had influenced the villagers' sense of self and their interaction with the world. Apollo hesitated to translate my question, perhaps struggling to grasp its essence. Nevertheless, Maharitsy managed to respond, shedding light on the matter.

Maharitsy: Most of the Vazaha tourists bring nothing new to us. We know their intentions and what they want to see, as has been the case since Bernard in 1997. We have family all over Madagascar and relatives abroad. We are not ignorant of the outside world. The real question is why we choose to live the way we do. That is a better question to ask.

In his work "Envisioning Power," Eric Wolf reminds us that no culture or society exists in isolation or a static form. He challenges the notion of primordial cultures frozen in time, as seen with the Kwakiutl Indians of the Northwest Pacific Coast (Wolf 1999:74). In "Europe and the People without History" (1982), Wolf dismantles the idea of historical vs. non-historical societies and emphasizes how societies excluded from European histories are deeply interconnected with global systems and changes. This perspective resonates with the Beronono Bara, as they may be self-contained and isolated from significant towns. However, they are not cut off from cultural and social activities, as Maharitsy pointed out.

Opposite me sat an older man who had been observing silently. His gaze transfixed on me, and although it was daunting, I occasionally met his eyes. After a few shared moments, he finally asked Apollo to translate, "So, how will you write about this tourist situation?" It felt like a tricky or test question. Aware of the divided opinions in the village, I hesitated, unsure if my response would align with one perspective or another. The room fell silent, anticipation filling the air. My eyes focused on a patch of the thatched mat beneath us. The silence grew unbearable, and their expectation weighed on me. Reluctantly, I evaded a direct answer and said, "I will write what the village people tell me." Another man interjected, breaking the silence, "Then write about the beauty of the Makay, encourage people from your home to visit us." I nodded in agreement, and one by one, they slowly stood up, stretching their legs and arms, and left the room.

Kinship and Marriage Preferences Among the Bara

The Bara's cultural adaptation is primarily pastoralism, with low population densities and a non-emphasized patrilineal descent (Kottak 1971:143). Kinship is calculated bilaterally, and affiliation with the mother's groups is essential. Taboos from both parents' descent groups are observed, and there is a preference for lineage exogamy. Lineage endogamy is allowed through the sacrifice of cattle (ibid). Faublee reports 22% of marriages were lineage endogamous in the 20th century (1954:36). Adoption is practised in low-density areas where herds, not land, are the strategic resource (Kottak:143).

Bara social groups include local agnatic (tariky) and dispersed cognatic clan (raza). The agnatic lineage is a small corporate group residing in one hamlet, sharing a joint tomb for their deceased (Huntington 187:33). The "tariky" originated when princes and subjects broke away from the larger Bara raza. The formation and origin of Bara groups will be further discussed later. Etienne de Flacourt mentions "tareche" in 1661, connected to Sikidy formula, translated as "road" (1661:173). Faublee demonstrates how a Bara raza, such as the Tambi, fragmented into nine branches, each with its own cattle earmark, and lost their common origin (1954:57-61). Bara history is complex and open to interpretation, with blurred kinship and the purification of incest through special rites (tandra), rather than expulsion or departure from the raza, contributing to social formation (Kent 1968:396).

Examining incest prohibition and Bara endogamy provides insights into their society. Needham argues against a general theory of incest, stating it is a mistaken sociological concept and not universal (1971:29). Burton demonstrates how folk theories of incest prohibition are consistent and accurate, aligning with western notions often disregarded by social sciences (1973:504-516). Maurice Bloch's study of Merina culture reveals a contradiction in the moral and tactical advantages of close marriages (1971b:52, 1971a:171). Incest prohibition among the Bara is linked to moral and physical effects between kinsmen, and its preferential rule is explained in terms of economic morality (1971a:171).

Bara society is built upon the balanced principles of gender differentiation. Males are associated with ancestors, providing normative structure for local lineages, while females are linked to undifferentiated principles and fertility spirits within the wider clan (Huntington 1978:33).

The Bara distinguish between kin (hava) and non-kin (tsy-hava) when considering marriage alliances, with forbidden sexual partners falling into the latter category. Kinship (fihava) holds utmost importance in Bara social life, and obligations between kin are governed by taboos (fady), both minor and major. Marriages between kin are allowed and strategic, provided the 'tandra' ritual is performed.

This ritual removes the general taboo on sexual relationships between kin, as explained by Faublee (1953:34-36) and Rakoto (1966:7-22, 1971:95-100). The 'mangala togno' atonement ritual, on the other hand, helps establish common kinship ties between two families over genealogical time (Huntington 1978:36). The 'mangala tongo' atonement and 'tandra' ritual can be seen as defining the outer and inner limits of preferred endogamy (46). The functions of taboo, as Steiner suggests, create a universe of properties that shape structured social life (1967).

A significant structural feature of Bara society is the contrast between male-relatedness and female-relatedness. Indigenous notions of sexual conception, where flesh comes from the mother and bone from the father, provide metaphors for interpreting social organization and activity. The Bara use expressions and metaphors, such as "food makes the flesh," to emphasize this understanding. The intimate connection through food underscores the nurturing bond between mother and child, specifically the mother's milk, which continues the blood connection between mother and fetus. The ties through females are primarily seen as biological (related to birth). In contrast, ties through males are seen as social (related to the dead) (Huntington 1978:55). Ancestor worship plays a prominent role in Bara social life.

Considering the Makay as a tourist venture, the presence of the Beronono Bara village and the ongoing influx of Vazaha tourists raise essential questions about potential conflicts and their resolution. The impact of Makay Tourism on the Bara community may exacerbate existing conflicts or give rise to new ones. The role of the ancestral realm in providing harmony and cohesion among the Bara remains a crucial factor in shaping their ties and resolving these conflicts.

“Insights and Disturbing Discoveries: Conversations with Alfred and a Haunting Encounter”

Each day in Beronono village I lacked specific tasks, allowing me to explore within my accepted boundaries. I observed that the younger men were often found in the northwest part of the village during the morning, while the women tended to their homes and village-centred duties. The men engaged in farming and herding Zebu for most of the day, while the older men found their roles within the village. As for me, without defined anthropological tasks, I struggled to find my place and purpose in the community.

Yearning to become more involved in daily activities, I sought ways to be helpful and contribute wherever I could. Gradually, my presence became more accepted, even by those I had not spent much time with or in conversation. In moments of idle time, I often strolled on the patio, deep in thought, as my host occasionally reminded me of my purpose there.

One day, my host called me over, handed me a stick, and instructed me to grind rice in the pestle. I gladly took on the task, feeling valuable and content. However, Alfred, who emerged and began to smile, clarified that rice grinding was not a duty typically assigned to men. But as a Vazaha, it was acceptable for me. Alfred sat nearby, watching me and occasionally offering guidance on technique and efficiency.

Midway through our conversation, Alfred asked, "Do you enjoy life here, Kadi?" Keeping my rhythm while grinding, I turned to him and replied, "Yes, it's quite a change from my life in England." I hoped he would not delve into questions about my impressions of primitiveness, but fortunately, he shifted the topic to previous researchers who had studied the Bara, particularly mentioning Jacques Faublee. Although Faublee was not the only researcher to have explored Bara country, I confirmed that I had read some of his works, albeit not extensively.

Curiosity still lingering, Alfred continued, "So, do you have a wife, Kadi?" Suppressing a smile, I responded, "No." Alfred seemed relieved, remarking that my work would be more challenging if I had a wife. I enjoyed our discussion while continuing to grind rice.

Suddenly, Alfred asked if I would encourage more people to visit the Makay upon returning to England. Impulsively, I replied, "If I were a tour company, I would do so. However, instead, I plan to write about your efforts to develop tourism in the Makay, addressing how you manage the dynamics between outsiders and the local way of life, as well as the associations involved both now and in the future." My response seemed unexpected, and Alfred inquired further, seeking clarification on which associations I referred to. I explained that I meant the Makay Association, Nature Evolution, and other potential stakeholders. Just as my host returned and relieved me of my duties, I sensed her disapproval of my work, conveyed through a remark to her sister, who had been sitting beside me, breastfeeding her child all along.

Expressing their disagreement with Nature Evolution, my host emphasized the village's responsibility to preserve the Makay and ensure that the Vazaha's preferred attractions are maintained while respecting their traditions. They believed it was their duty to take care of both worlds. I agreed with their perspective. The mention of French researchers involved in occasional projects piqued my

curiosity, and Alfred confirmed their association with Nature Evolution Madagascar (NEM), led by Bernard Forgeau. I made a mental note to revisit this information later.

Apollo informed me that Sey was requesting my presence at his place, so I decided to accompany Apollo and head over. Upon arriving, I found a visitor already present. Loud music played from a DVD player, the same music we had listened to during our trek. Sey told me he would attend to me shortly, and I observed a transaction. An unfamiliar man measured cups of rice from a sack and handed them to Sey's wife, receiving nine batteries in return. It was a fascinating barter exchange, reminiscent of traditional trade practices in the Bara villages. Once the transaction concluded, the man bid his farewell.

Sey then mentioned having a gift for me, promising an exciting photo opportunity for my work. Intrigued, I followed Sey and Apollo outside, camera ready. I was taken aback as we turned the corner of Sey's storage house. There, hanging from the branches, was a Sifaka, set up perfectly for a picture. Initially amazed, I asked if it was sleeping, to which Sey and Apollo burst into laughter, assuring me that it was indeed dead, and I was safe. Anger welled up within me, but I wanted to be sure of my reaction. "How did it die?" I inquired. Sey casually explained that he had killed it for me in the Tohamba forest, east of Beronono. He even mentioned his unsuccessful attempt to shoot a Brown Lemur (Variky). Speechless, I felt a mixture of sorrow and anger. Sifakas were my favourite species of Lemur, and the sight of the lifeless one hanging there, recalling the moments I had cherished while observing them up close at the Tana zoo, deeply saddened me. "What is wrong with you? Take a picture; I have to cook it soon!" Sey urged me impatiently. Reluctantly, I captured the image and distanced myself from the scene. Overwhelmed by a sombre and melancholic mood, I could not shake off the haunting image of that particular Sifaka. Sey's explanation that he had killed it for me intensified my distress.

Apologies and Reflections

After some time, Apollo and Sey noticed the noticeable change in my demeanour. Apollo approached me and informed me that Sey wanted to apologize, assuring me he would never kill another Sifaka again. This incident marked the end of such actions. Though I remained silent and struggled to find words, my emotions were evident.

As I immersed myself further in the community, I encountered more of its complexities. Naturally, I felt even more upset because the Sifaka was my favourite species. However, as my thoughts settled, a sense of calm came over me. I realized that it was not my place to pass judgment. I was merely scratching the surface of life here, far removed from the true reality. In a way, I was grateful to Sey for presenting me with this opportunity, regardless of my personal feelings. It sheds light on the contradictions in behaviour and attitudes among the villagers.

Recalling Maharitsy's observations about the villagers' demotivation and linking it to Alfred's earlier comment about their responsibility for preserving the reserve, I pondered the role of the Makay Association in disrupting the harmony and balance of village relations. It remained unclear how discontentment or disruption influenced the dynamics within the community.

Exploring Sacred Lakes and Enchanting Landscapes: Unveiling Makay's Treasures

No matter how long I immersed myself in the village, there were moments when I felt like a tourist. Today was one of those days. The scorching sun served as a constant reminder of the harsh environment. Sey had organized an excursion to visit some of the sites frequented by tourists, emphasizing the added value it would bring to my research. Although his intentions may have been influenced by the tension lingering from the Sifaka incident, I welcomed the opportunity to explore.

We set out on a familiar path but soon encountered another Bara individual in the arid wilderness. He was meticulously collecting fallen branches, creating a neat bundle. As our gazes met, I sensed the surprise of the Bara people in encountering a Vazaha in their midst, especially one casually traversing their territory. Sey likely explained our presence, initiating a conversation in Gasy, before we continued on with our travel.

Each step made it apparent that we had entered an unfamiliar area. The towering Karst Mountains surrounded us, their rugged and sharp features giving an imposing impression. We followed the dry riverbeds, which acted as our guide throughout the walk, a route ingrained in our routine.

Sey and Apollo directed my attention to fresh marks on the sand, indicating the recent presence of a creature. With growing familiarity, I recognized it as a missed encounter. Apollo jokingly suggested it was an alligator, and we decided to follow its tracks. Fortunately, luck was on our side as the tracks vanished into Lake Nosilahy, one of the three lakes on our itinerary, which tourists also frequent near Sakamangitsy.

Nestled amidst mountains, Lake Nosilahy offered a tranquil oasis. Apollo explained that all lakes in the Makay were considered sacred, prohibiting bathing or any other natural activities. After a brief pause, we continued towards Ambiamifehy. The lake derived its name from the "Via" plants resembling resting bananas, gently swaying on or below the water's surface. Underground vents connected its water to Nosilahy, weaving through the karst formations. Observing the serene scenery, we could not help but appreciate the respite these lakes provided in the sweltering heat. Sey, perhaps in jest, urged us to proceed swiftly,

evoking the possibility of an alligator encounter. Although I questioned the validity of his remark, we resumed our journey on the familiar path along the dry riverbed.

Piecing together the mental image of the Makay tour, I envisioned a circular route encompassing various sites. It would likely begin at the Lemur-filled Tohamba forests, traversing from east to west, culminating at the final campsite of Saririaky, where tourists would spend a day.

Saririaky, the largest of the three lakes we visited, was less concealed, surrounded by scattered mountains that lent an airy ambience to its shores. Vegetation and trees adorned the eastern and northern banks, while access was limited to the south and west. We took a lunch break in this picturesque location, and to my delight, a mango tree was nearby. Although relishing the rejuvenating taste of the fruit, the prospect of having only one left me longing for more.

Encounter with Dada: Makay's Cultural Nuances

As lunch simmered and a peaceful siesta enveloped our temporary camp, rustling sounds gradually approached, arousing our attention. A young Bara man emerged from the vegetation, carrying customary belongings. He introduced himself as Dada, and upon seeing me, the conversation momentarily halted until Apollo resumed the dialogue. It became evident that Dada would be joining us for lunch.

Curiosity led me to inquire about Dada's presence in the highlands. In response, he unpacked instruments from his bag and revealed a parcel wrapped in leaves. Grinding its contents with his hand, he filled a bamboo pipe, which he then smoked. "Jamala, my friend, Jamala," he exhaled, relaxing as he reclined against a tree trunk, lost in his thoughts.

My suspicions were confirmed Jamala was indeed marijuana. Dada explained that they grew the plant in the nearby mountains for personal use. Surprisingly, our presence on this day, devoid of any known tourist excursions, caught him off guard. They anticipated a tourist group's arrival in the Makay in a few days. This revelation sparked my curiosity, prompting further questions.

"Why is it surprising to stumble upon us?" I inquired. Dada hesitated as if contemplating whether to provide a more candid response. "Not everyone approves of Jamala, and we prefer not to flaunt it openly. Additionally, the Makay is filled with sacred places, and we do not want to attract too much attention," he explained. Sey attended lunch while Apollo, seemingly wary of my questions, displayed subtle signs of discomfort. However, I pressed on. "Does the presence of Vazaha threaten growing Jamala in the Makay?" With a satisfied glint in his eyes, Dada inhaled once more before responding, "The path where you have camped today is also where Vazaha set up camp during their excursions. It is the only accessible path leading north from here. So, in a way, we must be cautious." The mention of Malaso lingered on my mind, and I could not resist asking. Apollo's fidgeting fingers and his proximity to the rifle indicated he had anticipated this line of questioning. "What about the Malaso?"

As I posed this question, I noticed additional embellishments adorning Dada. Particularly striking was the necklace he wore, absent from Apollo and Sey. It dawned on me that I might be conversing with another individual connected to the Malaso world. Dada took his time to respond, further heightening my intrigue. "Yes, this may eventually pose a problem for the Malaso, but we will adapt. The number of Vazaha remains relatively low, so we manage with the timing. However, as tourist numbers increase, we must find new paths." I nodded, at a loss for words. Apollo and Sey, seemingly disinterested in this conversation, remained silent. It was clear that my direct approach was not the typical manner of inquiry, yet it did not create tension. Dada remained calm and composed, occasionally refilling his Jamala pipe.

"So, Kadi, would you like to camp here tonight?" Sey joined our small circle, having finished preparing lunch. This question skillfully transitioned the conversation, shifting the mood. "As tempting as it sounds, I think I will pass," I replied. "Do not worry; no one else will pass through today," reassured

Dada, understanding my concern about the Malaso. In truth, the Malaso was the sole reason I declined the offer to camp. It seemed they understood me better than I understood them.

The Makay's Next Generation: Ramon's Perspective

As my time in the village drew to a close, I realized that I still needed to delve into the insights of the younger generation regarding the Makay tourism situation. How did they perceive the current situation, and how would they navigate the growing influence of tourism in their lives? Ramon, the son of Alfred, seemed like the perfect person to shed light on these questions. With his involvement in various roles, including tending to the Zebu, teaching at the local school, and occasionally serving as a tour guide and porter, Ramon was poised to become a prominent member of the Makay association or perhaps forge a new path in the Makay tourism industry.

As dusk settled in, those fortunate enough to have generators or solar panels illuminated their mud brick windows with electric lights. Others relied on oil lanterns or embraced the darkness. I had urged Apollo to arrange a dinner meeting with Alfred's son, Ramon, and he readily agreed. It struck me how their names sounded, unlike traditional Bara names, but I did not delve deeper into that thought.

Ramon had arranged a cosy roundtable seating on the floor, creating a homely atmosphere that instantly put me at ease. There was no need for formal introductions, as we were all familiar with one another. Finally, after my time in Beronono village, I could converse with Ramon.

I was eager to uncover the effects of tourism on the Beronono Bara community and learn if the increasing presence of visitors would alter their way of life. I asked Ramon about his experiences and whether he believed that tourism would reshape their village, drawing comparisons to places like Ranohira and Sakaraha to help illustrate my point. Ramon's response was guarded yet resolute as he unfolded his arms and met my gaze. "The Bara will always hold onto their customs and way of life," he stated firmly. He emphasized that the primary change brought about by tourism was the heightened commitment to safeguarding the cultural sites and biodiversity of the Makay.

Curiosity propelled me to inquire further about the role of young people and those not directly involved in tourism in this preservation effort. Ramon asserted that only some had recognized the potential benefits. However, he emphasized that those actively working to improve the Makay situation would reap the rewards, inspiring the more reserved individuals to join in and discover the advantages of participation.

Interrupting my next question, Ramon raised his finger as if struck by a sudden realization. "The young people have already witnessed the benefits," he exclaimed, highlighting their increased employment opportunities as porters and guides. He emphasized that in their isolated village, disconnected from the outside world, the younger generation understood the significance of education and strived to make the most of it. With an open gesture, Ramon indicated that I could proceed with my subsequent inquiry.

I smiled, acknowledging his eloquence and insightful perspective, and Ramon smiled back. Apollo took on the role of note-taker, maintaining a mostly silent presence throughout the conversation. Continuing our discussion, I probed into the negative impacts of tourism. Without hesitation, Ramon pointed out the economic factors. However, he clarified that the Makay association should receive the benefits, as they actively created opportunities. He assured me that the aim was to involve everyone, young and old, in various capacities, hoping the other villagers would be encouraged to join these collective efforts.

With the conversations drawing to a close, I turned to Ramon, eager to understand his role in the evolving landscape and whether he would carry on the legacy of his father, Alfred, and others. Ramon snapped his fingers, pausing briefly before responding. "I will certainly be involved in the tourism venture. People like Apollo and me," he glanced at Apollo with a hint of sarcasm, "are the future of Beronono. But I do not get carried away with solely catering to tourists. I still live by Bara customs and act as a role model for the younger generation. I want to show them that we can benefit from tourists without compromising our way of life. The younger generation will reap the rewards as we develop infrastructure like hotels and restaurants. However, above all, I will always live as a Bara."

As my time in Beronono village neared its end, I felt a sense of closure. Having engaged in casual and profound conversations with the Beronono Bara, I felt a deep connection to this place. Given the Bara's familiarity with my presence, I am comfortable asking Ramon about his perspective on the Malaso.

Ramon asked if I understood the distinction between traditional and current forms. He highlighted the sacred and auspicious nature of the Zebu, which represents the essence of Bara culture. Almost every

cultural practice and tradition, from ceremonies to marriages and festivities, involves the presence of the Zebu. Ramon emphasized that the Zebu is a defining characteristic that sets the Bara apart from other ethnicities in Madagascar.

As Ramon shared these insights, it resonated with me, aligning with my research expeditions through Bara country. Encouraging him to continue uninterrupted, I conveyed my willingness to listen, even if I did not fully comprehend the depth of his words.

Ramon explained that the Malaso, in its current form, needs to be recognized by the Bara. However, he acknowledged the underlying factors contributing to its existence. To understand this, he pointed out two crucial issues. First, the lack of infrastructure, evident in the poor state of the roads within Bara territory, hampers the transportation and sale of Bara products to other regions. It discourages agricultural and artisanal production, leading to wasted resources. Second, the lack of accessible education and the perception of the Bara as uneducated create a challenging environment. In the face of these obstacles, it becomes comprehensible why the youth turn to Malaso activities for income and a sense of purpose. Do you follow my reasoning? Ramon asked, seeking my understanding.

I nodded in agreement, signalling to Ramon that I understood. Curiosity piqued, he continued to share his insights.

Ramon explained that the Malaso, though differentiated between its traditional and present forms, remains an act of stealing Zebu—a distinct aspect of Bara identity. While outsiders may perceive the act as barbaric and savage, the Bara view it differently. Ramon acknowledged the need to understand why the Malaso has taken on its current form, involving plundering and pillaging villages, often resulting in the loss of Bara lives. He connected this phenomenon to my research on tourism, emphasizing that for the Bara in Beronono, engaging with tourism presents an opportunity to own and manage their organization. In many other Bara towns, hotels and tourist facilities are predominantly owned by non-Bara individuals, such as Vazaha or the Merina. Bara citizens working in these establishments often hold lower-level positions rather than managerial roles. Ramon shared this information to better understand the context surrounding us, which I might not have fully grasped during my time in Bara country.

Ramon did not press me for further questions. Instead, he welcomed them and seemed to assess my intentions. Previous encounters with Vazaha, who promised involvement but disappeared after leaving Bara country, likely lingered in his mind. As we concluded our dinner, accompanied by a round of rum in which Apollo indulged while evading it himself due to stomach issues, Ramon playfully

commented on my ability to handle the rum, cautioning me not to become Mamo, the equivalent of being drunk.

With darkness enveloping the village, most residents had retired for the night. The walk back to our residence was brief, just a minute away.

"Navigating Tradition and Change: Insights from Ramon and the Beronono Bara"

The conversation with Ramon offered valuable insights into the impact of tourism on the Beronono Bara and their perspectives on the Malaso activity. Ramon emphasized the importance of preserving Bara customs and ways of life while benefiting from tourism opportunities. He highlighted the challenges faced by the Bara, including limited infrastructure and educational opportunities, which contribute to the emergence of activities like Malaso as a means of income and purpose for the younger generation. Ramon also shed light on the disparities in ownership and management of tourist facilities, underscoring the significance of the Bara's involvement and control over their organization in Beronono. These revelations deepen my understanding of the complex dynamics within Bara society and align with the broader themes explored throughout my ethnography, such as the intersection of tradition and modernity, the impact of external influences on indigenous communities, and the pursuit of self-determination amidst socio-economic constraints. As I reflect on my ethnographic research, Ramon's perspectives serve as a poignant reminder of the multifaceted realities faced by the Beronono Bara and the nuanced nature of their engagement with tourism and cultural practices.

“Embracing the Makay and Unveiling Untold Stories"

The Makay is yet to be an official tourist destination. Visitors mainly arrived through word of mouth, with tour operators organizing excursions only upon learning of their interest in the Makay. Tourists arrived sporadically, and I had hoped to witness at least a solitary traveller or a small group venturing into the Makay. However, my encounters remained limited to their shadows in the narratives shared by locals or chance meetings with travellers outside of Bara country who had either visited or heard of the Makay. Nonetheless, today I would be granted the tangible presence of tourists in the Makay, leaving me curious about what the future holds. My departure from Beronono was scheduled for

tomorrow morning, Friday. I had arrived with only a backpack and had worn three outfits throughout my stay. All the essentials were prepared for the morning trek, mirroring the voyage from Beroroha to Beronono. The day ahead promised to be filled with farewells and a bittersweet atmosphere, and the breakfast routine was a comforting ritual that exuded a sense of familiarity. "It's a shame you are leaving us, Kadi. We have grown accustomed to your presence," Alfred said, finding me on the patio as I sipped my coffee. He placed a hand on my shoulder, triggering a wave of reminiscence. "You know, Kadi, when you return to England, tell the people about this place. The Makay du Massif, tell them about us. We are grateful to have had you here, and you have become known as the Vazaha guy. I hope to see you again soon, my friend. The Makay awaits you." I do not mean to sound overly sentimental, but I was genuinely touched then. The realization hit me that I would be back in Tana in just three days, and this experience would seem like a distant memory. I looked around the village, observing the ebb and flow of daily life. Alfred sat beside me, engaged in a lighthearted conversation with his wife, who was engrossed in her basket weaving. Then, I recalled Bernard Forgeau and decided to revisit my notes. Several months earlier, back in Tana, I talked with Catherine Reeb, a PhD researcher specializing in Systematic and Evolution at the Institute de Systematique Evolution Biodiversity, Sorbonne University in Paris, France. She was part of the Nature Evolution expedition team and well-informed about the proceedings in the Makay. Per our discussion and my notes, the Makay was designated as a "New Protected Area" (Nouvelle Aire Protegee, NAP) in June 2017. Bernard Forgeau held sole responsibility for managing Nature Evolution Madagascar, which had no direct association or connection with Nature Evolution.

Consequently, any infrastructural development, proposals, or engagement within the Makay required collaboration and approval from Bernard. I was surprised to rediscover this information in my notes, as it had slipped my mind during my entire time in the Makay. Strangely, no one in Bara country, particularly in Beronono, had mentioned this aspect of the Makay. I decided to inquire about Alfred's thoughts on the matter.

"Alfred, what role does Bernard Forgeau have in your association here in Beronono?" I asked. Alfred looked at me puzzled, as if I had spoken an unfamiliar language. "There is no role for him," he replied, implying that Bernard and Nature Evolution Madagascar were not involved in the picture. "The Makay became a NAP park in 2017, and Bernard Forgeau is responsible for managing it through Nature Evolution Madagascar." Alfred paused everything he was doing and focused solely on our conversation. "Can I see your notes?" I handed him my journal, open to the relevant page. He flipped through a few pages, realizing they were all in English, and then returned it to me. "This is interesting to know. We had no idea, and nobody specifically told us about this." He shrugged, picked up a small

stone, and flung it across the patio. "But it does not make a difference." We sat silently for a moment, and then Alfred picked up a handful of sand, tightly closed his fists, and let the sand slip through his fingers. "As I have told you before, we are the true caretakers of the Makay. The essence of the Makay flows through us, as it has for generations. I do not think anyone can or will control the Makay except the Bara."

I decided to venture out of the village and contemplate at Sey's complex. I was wondering where Apollo was at the moment. As I passed by the Makay River, I saw women bathing. Embarrassed, I froze momentarily, and the women began to cover their breasts while giggling. Realizing my mistake and fearing they might think I was spying on them, I quickly ran across the river to the other side and continued.

Sey's children played in the front yard while their mother prepared rice. The youngest child still saw me as the mysterious Vazaha Devil and would hide behind his mother or siblings. However, he no longer cried upon seeing me, which I considered progress. Since Sey was away, there was no point in lingering. I continued exploring the surrounding area of the village on my own, which felt liberating and gave me a sense of accomplishment. With time to reflect, I realized I was walking alone, unaided, and at my discretion. I thought, "Should I go hang out with the young folks in that unexplored part of the village?" I felt brave and empowered, more so than ever since my research began. So, I followed through with my decision, and as I approached the houses, I could not help but feel like I might be infringing on some unspoken rules or disturbing someone. Nevertheless, it was too late to turn back, and one of the villagers sitting outside his house spotted me.

"Vazaha! Vazaha!" he called out, followed by some unintelligible words in Gasy. I knew he was referring to me, so I walked over. He pointed to a small wooden stool beside him, and I sat. He recognized who I was. Of course, they would know—I do not know why I assumed otherwise. He signalled for another man to come out of the house opposite his. A young, sturdy-looking fellow, clearly engaged in manual labour judging by his defined physique, came out and greeted me. "Ah, Vazaha, you have finally decided to embrace us. We were wondering why you never came this way," he said. "I apologize; I mostly spent my days with Apollo and Sey, so my schedule was already set. Also, I'm not very fluent in Gasy.

"What do you guys do all day? I see you in the morning, and then you disappear for the rest of the day," I inquired. "I'm Freddie," he said. "I'm Kadi." We quickly exchanged a few details before he finally addressed my question. "We do what we always do, Bara things and ordinary things. I take care of the fields and the zebu and go to school. As for Rakoty, old age has caught up with him, so you might want

to ask him about his activities. I can only speak for myself." I took that as a concise answer and shifted the conversation towards the Makay.

"Do you guys visit the Makay often?" Freddie seemed perceptive and understanding. "Is this related to your research?" "Yes, it is, but I'm also genuinely curious," I replied. Rakoty sat between us, his leg folded, seemingly pleased that I was not bombarding him with direct questions. "We do not need to go to the Makay; it is for the tourists these days. The Makay is a place of our ancestors, and we respect that, but it also has the potential to create. As you have come to understand, with the tourists, the Makay can also become a place for the Vazaha. Maybe it can exist as both, who knows?" I wished I had spoken with Freddie earlier during my stay. His way of speaking reminded me of Narindra. "What do you mean by 'exist as both'?" I inquired. "Oh, you know, a place for the living and a place for our ancestors."

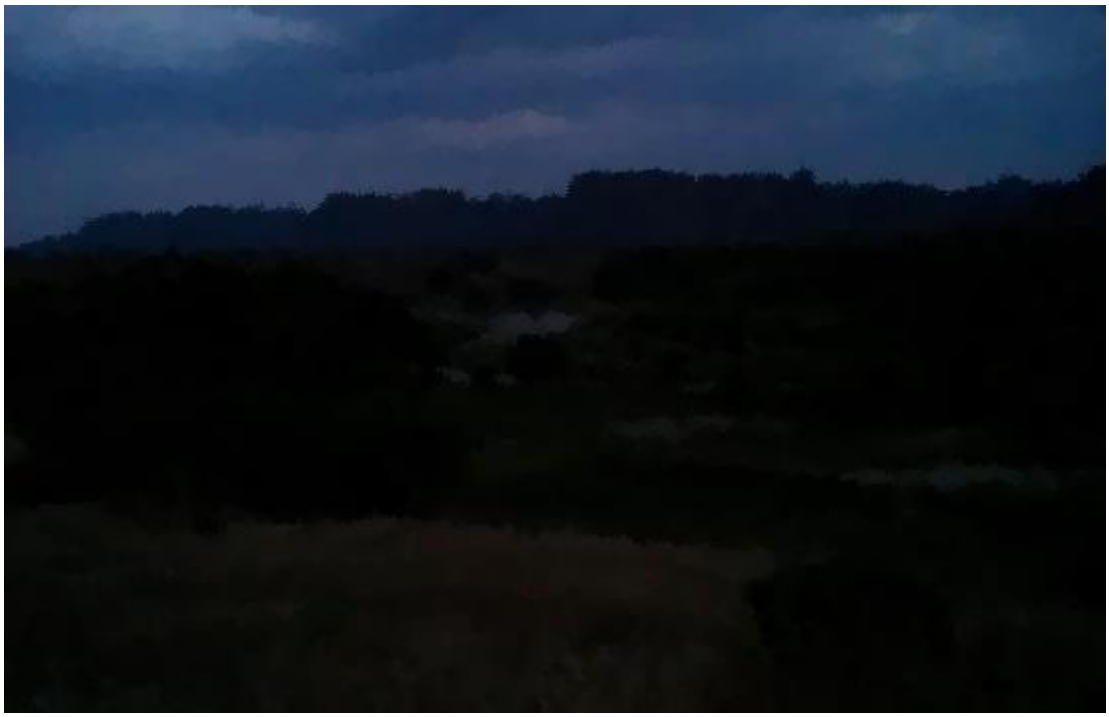
The sound of a distant vehicle grew louder as it approached. Children started running towards the school as they passed by where we were sitting. "What is happening?" I asked Freddie. "Oh, it seems more Vazaha have arrived." "Should we go see them?" I asked. Freddie burst into laughter. "Well, I will not stop you if you want to see what is going on." Two 4x4 vehicles were parked near the large tree on the school playground. Most of the villagers had gathered there. I observed from a distance and could find Pierre Nambo, followed by two apparent tourists. Finally, the driver, Francis, stepped out. A pleasant feeling washed over me. I waited until the children and villagers had their fill of greeting the tourists and inspecting the cargo on top of the vehicles. "Excitement" was an understatement as the people welcomed the tourists with joy and admiration. There may have been some gifts or surprises in the cargo for them. There might be an interesting anecdote behind that thought.

Francis noticed me in the background and approached with a smile. "Kadi, you are still here. It's good to see you, my friend."

We embraced each other warmly. "It's good to see you too, my friend. Unfortunately, I will be leaving tomorrow, but I'm glad I could witness this. Everyone seems excited. Is it always like this?" I inquired. "Yes, the villagers are always thrilled to receive guests, especially the children. They do not often get to see vehicles, so the sound of the engine revving excites them," Francis explained. I noticed the tourists observing the transportation of cargo. "So, who are the tourists you brought to Beronono?" I asked. "Oh, they are two Americans who work for the US Embassy," Francis replied. "I am unsure if they are here on business or for leisure. My job is to drive, so I do not know. Does it even matter?" With that, Francis left to assist in transporting the cargo to the tourist camp on the other side of the Makay River, away from the village. It was a makeshift campsite where the visitors would stay in their tents.

Once the initial excitement had settled and most of the villagers returned home, I seized the opportunity to approach one of the travellers who still needed to make their way to the campsite. After introducing myself and explaining my presence, we briefly talked. Douglas and his friend Richard had heard about the Makay through word of mouth. They were looking for off-the-beaten-path locations in the country, seeking the thrill of the unexplored and the experience of venturing into the deep Bara territory—a story to tell. I refrained from mentioning that the Makay had already been relatively explored, not wanting to dampen their expectations. Just as quickly as our conversation began, one of the group members came to fetch Douglas and guide him to the tourist camp. I watched as they passed through the village and disappeared into the distance.

Now I was alone. Everyone had returned to their daily routines, and the excitement that once filled the air dissipated into a quiet atmosphere. Francis and the tourists were likely settling into the camp on the other side of the village. Finally, there were outsiders besides myself in the Makay—a scenario I had hoped for throughout my stay. Ironically, on my last day, this wish came true. As darkness gradually enveloped the surroundings, I realized it was too late to head to the camp. I was stuck here, and once morning arrived, I would have to leave the Makay, Beronono village, and the people I had come to know and call friends. Most of all, the opportunity to accompany the tour group through the Makay was now regretfully out of reach. I glanced at the Makay and its surroundings before returning home.



“Reflections on Authenticity, Narratives, and Cultural Exchange: Unveiling the Complexities of Indigenous Tourism in Beronono”

Throughout my ethnography in the remote village of Beronono and the beautiful Makay region, I have delved into the complexities of authenticity, narratives, cultural loss, and indigenous tourism. The dialogues and events that unfolded provided: glimpses into the lives of the Bara people, their connection to the land, and the challenges they encounter in the face of a changing world
As I reflect on my time here, I am struck by the interplay between the expectations and desires of the locals and the outsiders and how these shape the dynamics of cultural exchange.

The encounters with Alfred, Maharatsy, Ramon, and Rakoty shed light on the Bara people's deep-rooted attachment to the Makay. Their voices resonated with a sense of authenticity, emphasizing their role as the true custodians of this sacred land. However, the introduction of Bernard Forgeau and Nature Evolution Madagascar disrupted their perceptions, highlighting the clash between local narratives and external expectations. The Makay became a designated NAP park, attracting tourists and sparking debates about its purpose and control over its management. The dialogue with Rakoty, where he contemplated the Makay's potential existence as a place for both the living and the

ancestors, hinted at the complexities of preserving cultural heritage while accommodating tourism. This notion tied into my broader theoretical framework, examining how indigenous tourism can empower while ecotourism can erode cultural authenticity.

As I witnessed the arrival of the American tourists, Douglas and Richard, I observed the villagers' excitement and anticipation of gifts or other benefits. Their presence brought a momentary surge of economic opportunities and cultural exchange. However, I could not help but wonder about the long-term impact of such encounters on the Bara community and their way of life. The transient nature of tourism and the potential loss of cultural traditions and practices raised concerns about preserving their unique identity. These reflections, intertwined with the theoretical discussions on culture loss and indigenous tourism, serve as a poignant reminder of the challenges faced by marginalized communities when engaging with the outside world.

My ethnographic research has been a profound exploration of the intricate relationships between culture, tourism, authenticity, and narratives. The Bara community have deepened my understanding of cultural preservation's complexities and the potential consequences of external influences. I hope this ethnography not only sheds light on the unique experiences of the Bara people but also serves as a catalyst for further discussions on sustainable tourism practices and the preservation of indigenous cultures in an ever-changing world.

7

To Conclude

"From Captivity to Emancipation: Unshackling the Mind Within Cave Mahatigny"

Resting precariously on a rugged boulder positioned perfectly at the heart of the cave, I felt the perspiration clinging to my clothes, drenching my skin under the scorching heat. My gaze pierced through the cavern's darkness, attempting to unveil its mysteries. As my eyes struggled to adjust to the sudden contrast in light, I took a moment to regain my composure and allow my vision to acclimate to the environment. Once the haze cleared, a breathtaking sight unfolded before me—a sprawling display of cave paintings adorned every inch of the cavern walls. Symbols, shapes, and images merged to form a tapestry of ancient artistry, imbued with a profound history that beckoned me to unravel its secrets.

Overwhelmed by the enormity of the moment, I found myself speechless, partly due to the arduous trek that had left me breathless and partly due to the sheer weight of the occasion. A surge of happiness and excitement flooded my being as I beheld the very objects of my research. Countless nights spent in the confines of the university library, poring over scarce literature on the paintings and the history of the Makay people, suddenly converged in my mind. The visits to wise Shamans in Bara and neighbouring territories, seeking fragments of knowledge about the Malagasy divinatory practices, all swirled together in my thoughts. In that instant, as my eyes remained fixed on the cave walls, I whispered to myself, "It was worth it."

Moved by the intensity of the experience, I reached for my notepad, nestled beside me on the cave floor, eager to capture the profound thoughts surging within me and flipping open to a new page, where I had already inscribed the title, "The First Moments Inside Cave Mahatigny," a peculiar sensation tingled at the edges of my consciousness. Something didn't feel quite right, though I couldn't pinpoint precisely what it was. Just as I was about to set pen to paper, my fingers stiffened, instinctively abandoning the act of writing. Instead, my gaze was drawn back into the abyss of the cave.

A glimmer of sunlight penetrated the depths, casting ethereal rays that danced and flickered, guiding my eyes farter into the cave's recesses. I found myself captivated, spellbound by the interplay of light and shadow. An impulse propelled me to follow those luminous trails, tracing them back toward the cave entrance. It was at that moment that a burgeoning sense of unease began to pulse within me—I could feel it, a disquieting presence that set my nerves on edge.

Sey and Apollo, my companions on this expedition, were preoccupied with the rifle, their indifference evident. It was as if I stood alone in that cave, the sole witness to the extraordinary paintings adorning its walls. Their lack of enthusiasm contrasted sharply with my zeal, leaving me questioning my perceptions. Were the cave paintings merely a figment of my imagination, a mirage conjured by my passion and dedication? Doubts crept into my mind, yet the enigmatic allure of the cave paintings remained, inviting me to delve further into their story.

Perplexed by the stark contrast between my awe and the indifference of Apollo and Sey, I felt an insatiable urge to delve deeper into their perspectives. Little did I realize that this seemingly innocent inquiry would soon mark a defining moment in my ethnographic research. During this exchange, Sey unveiled a revelation that struck me with profound significance. He disclosed that Cave Mahatigny was no hidden treasure but rather an integral part of the tour itinerary for visitors exploring the enchanting expanse of the Makay region. Sey had traversed these sacred caves on numerous occasions, either in solitary reflection or while guiding curious travellers through the awe-inspiring landscape. As Sey continued to offer further insights, my mind began to detach from the present, wandering into realms of contemplation.

Lost in the labyrinth of my thoughts, I gradually became aware of a profound realization taking shape. It dawned on me that my perception of the cave paintings had been veiled by the colourful tapestry woven by my imagination and romanticized expectations. The desire to unravel the intricate interplay between local archaeology and the profound cosmology of the Bara had inadvertently ensnared my research within the confines of a bygone era—a fleeting moment in Bara history that had long since slipped through the fingers of time.

This awakening left me feeling like a captive in my reveries. The once-vibrant cave paintings, imbued with life and purpose, had transformed into mere shadows, mere relics of a bygone epoch when they stood as potent symbols of the Bara people's resistance against foreign intrusion. My obsession with this historical narrative distorted my view of the present, closing my eyes to the evolving role these ancestral masterpieces now played. No longer tasked with repelling invaders, these sacred depictions had acquired a new purpose—a beacon summoning curious visitors to immerse themselves in the beguiling wonders of the Makay.

As I unburdened myself from the boulder's weight, an intoxicating sense of liberation wafted through the air, stimulating my senses. The scent of emancipation filled my nostrils, invigorating my spirit.

Gazing upon the cave paintings for one last time, I conceded that my preconceived notions and insatiable expectations had held me captive, shackled by the chains of a static history recorded only in ancient texts and the oral traditions passed down by the Bara. It was time to relinquish control, to surrender myself to the tender guidance of the Beronono Bara. They alone were the true custodians of this ongoing saga, and it was my duty to transcribe their wisdom upon the pages of my manuscript humbly.

And so, on that fateful day, I found my emancipation within the labyrinthine depths of Cave Mahatigny, as the celestial rays of the sun pierced the abyss, illuminating the timeless shadows etched upon the cave walls. I bid farewell to the archaeologist who had once found solace within these ancient chambers, laying their weary bones to rest in the heart of the cave. In their place, the anthropologist arose, reinvigorated and purposeful, ready to navigate the intricate tapestry of the Bara's living culture. In the dim flicker of my shadow, I glimpsed the tacit approval of my esteemed professors, silently acknowledging the wisdom of this transformative choice. The presence of my post-tourist companions lingered in the air, steadfast in their belief that my true calling would reveal itself amidst the journey of fieldwork. But above all, it was the spectral echoes of the Bara tourist guides, awaiting my return at the cave entrance, whose essence would forever weave through the very fabric of my thesis.

With a renewed sense of purpose, I stood at the threshold of the cave, ready to embrace the unending voyage ahead. The cavernous depths of Cave Mahatigny gave me a glimpse into the intricate tapestry of the Bara people's heritage. Yet, as I emerged from the darkness into the radiant embrace of the sun, I realized that my research had only begun.

Within the pages of this thesis lies an endeavour to amplify the Beronono Bara's case for the Makay Tourism Venture—a tale of cultural resilience and self-empowerment. Immersing myself in the world of the Beronono Bara and chronicling my time with them, I sought to explore the concept of cultural plasticity and the potential of tourism as a catalyst for transformative change.

Amidst the unfolding narrative of emerging tourism in the region, I delved into their stories, hopes, and dreams, weaving together a tapestry that showcased the transformative power of tourism from their point of view. In a world where authenticity and genuine experiences are sought after by visitors and tourists, I aimed to shed light on the Bara's unique narrative. This narrative resonates deeply with

the growing community of post-tourist travellers seeking to embrace local truths rather than fabricated imaginaries.

It is within this context that the agency of the Beronono Bara emerges. Through tourism, they find a platform to reclaim their voice and shape their destiny, dismantling the dominant narratives that have long shaped perceptions of their people, environment, and way of life. No longer passive subjects of the tourist gaze, they become active participants in the unfolding story, challenging preconceived notions and asserting their cultural identity on their terms.

The path of the Beronono Bara has its challenges. As I ventured deeper into their world, I witnessed the delicate dance between preserving their cultural heritage and adapting to the demands of a burgeoning tourism industry. Their struggle lies in striking a balance that allows them to embrace the economic opportunities presented by tourism while safeguarding the integrity of their traditions and values.

Unveiling the Tapestry: Bara Tourism in the Making

This dissertation delves into the intricate realm of Bara tourism, exploring how this peripheral indigenous community cautiously navigates its engagement with tourism and envisions its future involvement, all while crafting new narratives that shape it's evolving identity. Furthermore, it seeks to unravel the interplay between visitors, tourists or post-tourists, and the emerging Bara tourism narratives.

To accomplish these research objectives, I present my ethnographic fieldwork in the captivating chapters commencing with "The Crossing" (Chapters 4 to 6). This immersive odyssey begins by immersing the reader in the rich tapestry of Beronono Bara life, setting the tone and contextual backdrop for the research. It then guides us along the tourist route, traversing from the bustling capital city to the heart of Bara territory, capturing the essence of the unfolding Bara tourism narrative. Finally, the research brings us full circle, returning to the Beronono Bara village, where we witness their imaginative visions of the tourism venture in the company of those who shape and envision it. Throughout this transformative odyssey, I grapple with my positionality as a researcher and an outsider, seeking to find my place within the tapestry of the Bara community and elucidate my findings with clarity and integrity.

A central aspect of my feildwork lies in unmasking the complexities of studying tourism. Much like the tourists, I was initially captivated by the allure of the cave paintings that adorn the region. I underwent a profound shift in my research focus, redirecting my attention from local archaeology to the burgeoning tapestry of the Makay du Massif's tourism encounter. By living among the Beronono Bara, I aimed to grasp the nuances and capture a profound sense of what this encounter truly entails for them, economically and socially, as they navigate through uncharted territory.

Amidst this labyrinth of exploration, I encountered the parallel criteria of authenticity that shape the articulation of new activities, often transcending historical ties to the traditional Bara way of life. The emergence of tourism has engendered a complex tapestry of emotions within the Beronono Bara villagers. While some share in the optimism and envision the potential benefits, others approach it cautiously, mindful of its potential challenges. Similarly, from the perspective of the tourist, the perception of the Bara tourism narrative unfolds against the backdrop of these multifaceted expectations and the quest for an authentic experience.

Amidst this tapestry of perspectives, one thing remains evident: the Beronono Bara's yearning to establish meaningful connections with the world, their fears of losing control over their cultural heritage, and the delicate dynamics that underlie every encounter within the realm of tourism. Regardless of their individual experiences, the tourism phenomenon has sparked a profound introspection among the Bara, compelling them to reflect on their cultural identity and redefine their representation within the broader world.

Empowerment: The Bara as Storytellers

In Chapter 6 of my fieldwork titled "The Bara as their own Storytellers," I delved into the remarkable way the Bara craft their narrative, weaving threads of identity, historicity, and cultural representation. They assume the roles of Indigenous Anthropologists and Archaeologists, utilizing traditional modes of cultural expression to authenticate their worldview. This process, intertwined with their engagement with tourism, creates a profound sense of empowerment—an aspect I aim to explore in this section.

The Bara, deeply rooted in ancestral authority, perceive their way of life and interactions with the world through the lens of their forefathers' teachings. Except for the urbanized Bara residing in towns and tourist hubs, rural Bara communities are organized into small hamlets and further segmented into

family units. Their daily lives revolve around cattle raising, gardening, hunting, foraging, basketry weaving, and general maintenance duties, all firmly entrenched in gender-assigned roles. Additionally, the Bara faithfully observe their traditional rites and customs, punctuating specific days throughout the calendar year. Given the richness of their heritage, one might wonder why the Beronono Bara would willingly expose their world to outsiders.

In a conversation with Pierre Nambo at Ranohira, he emphasized the Bara's keen understanding of tourism dynamics. They possess a profound awareness of what it entails to welcome outsiders into their territory and guide them through a pleasant journey of exploration. This perception of the local tourism encounter grants the Bara a sense of control, encapsulated in their frequently uttered expression, "We are Bara." It is within this sense of empowerment that the Beronono Bara find solace, recognizing the profound words of Dawid Kruiper, leader of the Khomani Bushmen (San): "I want the tourists to see me and to know who I am. The only way our tradition and way of life can survive is to live in the memory of the people who see us" (White 1995:17, emphasis added). The Beronono Bara hold a profound sense of their own Bara-ness and refuse to compromise their identity and what it represents.

In Chapter 2, I explored the impacts of tourism on the social, cultural, and economic realms. Extensive anthropological literature has examined the consequences of tourism for local societies, often focusing on concerns of cultural loss or commodification. However, in the case of the Beronono Bara, tourism, far from imposing cultural degradation, catalyses empowerment, emboldening their unique perspective and reinforcing their cultural identity.

Challenging the Commodification of Culture: Reevaluating Cultural Loss in Tourism

Greenwood's thesis (1972, 1977) presents a narrow perspective that reduces the social impact of tourism to a mere commodity that can be purchased by those with the means to do so. Drawing upon the example of the Alarda of Fuenterrabia, Greenwood focused on the social commentary of the locals who recognized the parade as a critical self-reflection for their community. However, as the parade transformed into a public product for consumption, the locals' impetus for participation diminished, and the deeper meaning behind the event was lost. The performance became a means for profit and a tourist attraction, deviating from its original intention. Thus, tourism's commodification of culture monetizes local ways of life and devalues the cultural meanings that establish and maintain collective

unity. This phenomenon is not exclusive to the Alarda, as numerous other instances of cultural commodification in the face of tourism can be found throughout the anthropological literature.

While I do not dismiss the reality of cultural loss in the wake of tourism, I challenge the notion that it is inherently destructive or unavoidable, as often portrayed in the literature. My conversations with Maharitsy, the director of Beronono Village, have prompted me to appreciate the concept of cultural autonomy. Maharitsy emphasized that the Bara people are not oblivious to the outside world but consciously choose to "live the way they live"—a way that may appear isolated from a Western perspective. His remarks echo Eric Wolf's observation (1999) that no people, culture, or society exists in complete isolation (see also James Clifford 1988) At this juncture, I depart from the pessimistic view of tourism as a destructive force. Cultural loss hinges on whether we perceive what has been "lost" as an inherent part of a culture sui generis or a part of the ongoing process of cultural evolution, where various changes have occurred over time. In this regard, I align myself with the perspective of scholars such as Michael Carrithers (1992) and Marshall Sahlins (1999), who view cultures as continuously adapting and shaping their social presence in dialogue with their past and future.

To grapple with the intricate nature of culture, we must adopt a flexible and processual perspective. By viewing culture as malleable, constantly adapting and changing, we can appreciate the ongoing continuity between past and present cultural expressions. Carrithers encourages us to shift our focus and question not what is universally true about humans given their diverse forms but rather what remains universally true amid the constant process of metamorphosis and re-creation across our various forms (1992:32). Michael Taussig (1993) demonstrates how through mimicry and interaction with external stimuli, there is a complex negotiation between local and global forces thus, leading to new forms of cultural expression and resistance. It illustrates the fluidity and signals the plasticity of culture. It is essential to recognize that the visible aspects of the Beronono Bara's way of life, such as their daily routines and architectural layouts, do not encapsulate the essence of their Bara identity. While they reflect a way of living in the world, they do not dictate the entirety of the Bara way of life. The critical link with the past for the Bara lies primarily in their Fomban-draza, their ancestral customs. Diminishing cultural manifestations to mere commodities is too simplistic and an inaccurate approach to what they are. The Bara live and practice customs in its present iteration which as attested through my research have not and do not continue in a straight trajectory from their ancestral forbearers, it is what the practice signifies and the reason for it which essentially symbolises the authentic nature of the custom and practice as handed down by their ancestral customs. This is what Geertz (1973) argues for against the reductive notion of cultures as commodities as Geertz demonstrates cultures

are complex systems of meaning which are continually negotiated and redefined. For these reasons Greenwood's thesis of commodification leading to culture loss is simply inaccurate and reductive as it does not account or consider the symbolic significance and meaning carried within the cultural object itself.

Considering this perspective, I am prompted to ask, drawing inspiration from Carrithers, what guarantees the preservation and safeguarding of culture from irreversible loss or damage? As many Beronono Bara have indeed expressed to me, reaffirming their Bara identity with the tautological phrase, "We are Bara," as long as their ancestral customs endure, the culture of the Beronono Bara cannot be damaged or lost. It is continuously embodied and reshaped through the actions of the Beronono Bara. Therefore, when the Beronono Bara engage in tourism, it becomes a localized manifestation of a globalized phenomenon. Sahlins aptly captures this process by stating that indigenous social actors seek to indigenize modernity by asserting some autonomy within their heteronomy (1999:410). When viewed through this lens, cultural loss becomes a misnomer, as communities can authentically demonstrate and share their story while living it.

If the Bara community maintains control over their tourism practices, there is no need to conceal or fabricate the cultural dimension of their way of life. The Beronono Bara exemplify this through their current role as guides for tourists in the Makay. As they practically operate tourism within the region, locals and outsiders, tourists and visitors, are mindful of the boundaries delineating accessible and prohibited areas within the Bara domain. This illustrates a point made by Skinner (2016) in that constructing places imbued with narratives for tourists reflects on the broader dynamics of cultural commodification, which entails the creation and negotiation of cultural experiences thus, further complicating Greenwood's simplistic and reductive argument that commodification leads to culture loss In actuality local communities actively engage with and reshape commodified cultural elements to fit their own needs and aspirations, in essence cultural authenticity is not lost but rather redefined through the process (ibid 2012). In Chapter 5, you will encounter tourists who, despite their unfamiliarity with the trappings of the tourist industry, respectfully assume the role of outsiders/tourists while being conscious of their position and status among the Malagasy. In this manner, Indigenous Tourism celebrates what Dawid Kruiper eloquently expressed: "The only way our tradition and way of life can survive is to live in the memory of the people who see us."

Unveiling Empowerment: The Choice to Forge Identity in Tourism

Tourism can bring forth two promising possibilities within the context of the Beronono Bara. Firstly, it allows them to solidify their identity and cultural representation amidst the ever-expanding global tourism industry. Secondly, tourism is a supplementary income source for the Beronono Bara, without necessarily reducing their rich cultural practices to mere commodities. Let's delve into these points further.

Embarking on the journey of building a tourism economy from scratch, and showcasing sites of interest and heritage, can be viewed as a constructive and synthetic process. As Marilyn Hatlzer's astutely points out, "exalting a particular culture and making money while doing it" need not be seen as contradictory (2000:16). In this light, the sense of empowerment, as perceived by the indigenous social actors, lies in having the power to make the "choice."

Transforming cultural and heritage sites into marketable products contributes to the notion of a globalized space where everything and anything can be commodified. However, this sense of empowerment through commodification does not necessarily entail something harmful or destructive. Following Felan Xie's syllogism, we can understand that:

1. Commodification does not inevitably destroy cultural products.
2. Culture and tourism can become inseparable.
3. The commodification of culture often serves as a culturally transformative mechanism in the pursuit of authenticity, a means to reconnect with one's true self, both individually and collectively, by appropriating elements from the past (2003:6-7).

To a certain extent, the Beronono Bara adopt practices associated with mass tourism while managing their tourism venture, such as promoting the Makay to tourists with specific tour prices. However, from the Bara perspective, these practices remain deeply rooted in local distinctiveness. As Comaroff and Comaroff remind us, profiting from what sets one apart can be carried out in universally recognizable terms (2009:24).

During my fieldwork, the individuals in the Beronono Bara with whom I interacted did not perceive tourism as a catalyst for cultural destruction. They reject the notion of ethnic tourism, often criticized for obliterating the essence it seeks to capture, rendering the social and cultural landscape devoid of meaning by creating a superficial sense of "authenticity" (Hillman 2003:182, after Britton 1982). Tourists visit the Makay, visually consuming its breathtaking landscape, and depart with a profound narrative that encapsulates the deep meaning interwoven with the historical legacy of the Makay.

These thoughts resonated with my conversation with Pierre Nambo at Ranohira, affirming the Bara's awareness of how tourism operates.

In essence, by taking charge of their tourism endeavours, the Beronono Bara preserve their cultural heritage and authentically share their story with the world. It empowers them to navigate the complex dynamics of tourism while upholding their unique identity and cultural significance.

Unleashing Empowerment: The Bara's Journey in Tourism

In the early stages of Bara tourism, a palpable sense of empowerment reverberates among the Beronono Bara community. Spending time with Ramon vividly illustrates how tourism has sparked a renewed sense of purpose, igniting a beacon of hope that the Bara can fully reap the rewards of their tourism endeavours. The once practical crafts of basketry and textile weaving now take on a new dimension as they serve the village's necessities and become valuable commodities sold to tourists, visitors, and outsiders. The income generated from tourism has enabled a villager in Chapter 3 to exchange his humble thatched roof for sturdy corrugated iron sheets. Yet, for Ramon, the actual value lies in the opportunities that lie ahead for the younger generation—a legacy forged through their investment in the pursuit of tourism. While it is true that tourism is still in its nascent stage, and not everyone has yet experienced equal benefits, Ramon firmly believes that the future will reward the Bara for their present sacrifices.

Paul Tafara finds empowerment in the natural ability of the Bara to create genuine opportunities and earn an honest living. This avenue surpasses the limited reach of governmental development and educational initiatives, which often push the youth towards engaging in Malaso activities. Similarly, Alfred shares in this optimistic outlook, standing alongside his brothers and son, urging me to share and retell the story of the Makay. They see it as a means to narrate their tale and invite others to witness the Bara reality as they wish it to be seen—an antidote to the common stereotypical portrayals that have often overshadowed the richness of Bara culture.

Viewed through this prism of local empowerment, the Makay Tourism Venture transcends borders. It allows the Bara to actively participate in a globalized activity with emancipatory and symbolic consequences. The Bara envision this venture as one they can truly claim as their own, free from the shackles of subservience to outsiders. They no longer rely on employment as security guards,

receptionists, or cleaners in establishments owned by Vazaha or Merina. They see in tourism the power to take charge and serve themselves. Ramon encapsulates this sentiment eloquently:

"The young people have already witnessed the benefits firsthand. They find extra work as porters; some even step up as guides. And in this secluded village, so detached from the outside world, the younger generation has grasped the importance of education and its endless possibilities."

The Bara's journey in tourism is not merely a means of economic sustenance but a catalyst for transformation, enabling them to break free from traditional moulds and forge their path towards empowerment and self-determination.

The Makay Tourism Tapestry: Unraveling Narratives, Expectations, and Authenticity

Beneath the surface of local empowerment lies a tapestry woven with three crucial threads: narrative, tourist expectations, and authenticity. As explored in previous chapters, these elements form the foundation of the Anthropology of Tourism. The Makay Tourism venture expertly weaves narratives that guide visitors along a path of discovery, revealing the essence of the Makay and connecting past, present, and future. Visitor expectations play a role, shaped by preconceived notions and guidebooks, while the venture strives to balance them with authentic encounters that surpass anticipation. Authenticity, a dynamic concept, is negotiated between the Bara hosts and their guests, reflecting the Bara's lived experiences while navigating tradition and change. In this complex tapestry, narratives, expectations, and authenticity interweave to shape the ever-evolving landscape of tourism, impacting people, places, and the shared human experience.

Narrative

Embedded within the intricate tapestry of my fieldwork experiences, a captivating narrative unfolds, intertwining the elements of Place, People, and the Encounter with Danger.

In this subtle realm of narrative, the interplay between insider and outsider perspectives becomes palpable. The Bara hold their descriptions deeply rooted in their lived experiences and cultural heritage. At the same time, the expectations of the outsiders, visitors, and tourists cast a distinct lens

through which they perceive and engage with the Makay. Within this delicate dance of narrative construction and negotiation, the true essence of the Makay is revealed and obscured, an ever-evolving tapestry of cultural encounters, human imagination, and the allure of the unknown.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these narratives are not always aligned with the authentic Bara perspective towards the Makay. They are often shaped by external forces, driven by preconceived notions and popular imaginations. Yet, they hold immense power in shaping the expectations and experiences of those who embark on this journey. These narratives become vehicles for constructing and perpetuating imaginaries (Salazar & Graburn 2016; Leite 2014)

Place: romanticised and naturalised

The allure of the Makay is often shrouded in a narrative that romanticises and naturalises its essence. Referred to as 'The Last Eden of Madagascar' by Nature Evolution Madagascar, the Makay becomes the canvas upon which an emerging narrative unfolds. It is portrayed as a realm of untamed biodiversity and pristine ecology—a vast expanse waiting to be explored, untouched by the outside world. Such descriptions align with the narratives propagated by tourism agencies and outsiders who organise excursions and tours into the Makay. However, it is essential to critically examine the narrative presented by these agencies, as it does not entirely reflect the reality of the Makay.

The descriptive terms used—untouched, pristine, unexplored—convey a sense of 'naturalness' that requires careful analysis. Raymond Williams (1976) astutely notes that the concept of "nature" is complex, perhaps the most intricate word in the English language. We must question the idea of nature when it is attached to descriptions of places and spaces. James Carrier emphasises that social conceptions of the environment often perceive it as a natural state existing independently of human intervention (2010). However, these generic perceptions of naturalness overlook the social and cultural meanings that individuals attribute to their local environments. In exploring the trek from Beroroha to Beronono Village, I uncovered a deeper understanding of the relationship between the Bara people and their environment. What initially appeared as a journey through uninhabited terrain devoid of human presence was, in fact, strategic navigation through a meticulously mapped and familiar landscape. The Bara had carefully chosen a path that provided easy access to water sources, fruit-bearing trees, and a smooth trail for their chariot cart.

The notion of a "pristine nature" is a peculiar construct that requires further examination (Carrier 2010. See also Escobar 1999, Cronon 1995). As Ingold aptly points out, it is an abstract notion held by individuals, denoting the natural environment as a separate entity divorced from human life—a world complete in itself (1993: 35). Our perceptions of nature, environment, landscape, and wilderness are often constructed through our social worlds. Consider Henry David Thoreau's famous declaration, "In Wilderness is the preservation of the World." (1982) This type of romanticising resonates with the experiences of the Beronono Bara and the Makay, where the interplay between human presence and the natural environment is contested and enigmatic.

In the realm of wilderness, perceptions have transformed over time. Once viewed as desolate, savage, and deserted (Cronon, 1996:8), the wilderness now serves as a sanctuary from the constraints and mechanisms of society, a place of freedom amidst the growing world of commodities and products. The Makay, labelled as a wilderness, seamlessly fits into this imagery. As Cronon aptly observes, "The trouble with wilderness is that it quietly expresses and reproduces the values its devotees seek to reject. The flight from history that is very nearly the core of wilderness represents the false hope of an escape from responsibility, the illusion that we can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past and return to the tabula rasa that supposedly existed before we began to leave our marks on the world" (1996:16).

The notion of "leaving our marks on the world" profoundly resonates with the Zafimaniry ideals of nature. As highlighted by Maurice Bloch: the Zafimaniry not only appreciate the panoramic views but also perceive flattening the landscape as a way of imprinting their presence upon it (Hirsch and Hanlon, 2003:75). Similarly, the Bara people have inhabited the Makay since time immemorial, tracing their ancestral lineage back to the Beronono Bara. The terrain of the Makay bears the imprints of centuries of journeys by multiple groups of migrating peoples. Its mountains, lakes, and cave shelters acquire social, cultural, and political significance through the ritualisation of space, transforming them into meaningful places.

Within the realm of Makay tourism, the Beronono Bara face limited control over portraying and presenting their beloved land to the outside world. However, amidst this dynamic, the Bara exercise agency in shaping a narrative that reflects their worldview during the encounters with tourists. The romanticised notion of an untouched, unexplored wilderness recedes into the background as visitors delve deeper into the Bara perspective. As depicted in the section "Unveiling the Veiled: Traversing the Enigmatic Bara Realm" in Chapter 4, Sey's profound knowledge of the Makay challenges the notion

of its uncharted nature. Sey's ability to point out an inconspicuous ant's nest concealed beneath shrubs raises questions about the depths of local knowledge that may appear insignificant to share. From the Bara standpoint, the pristine and unexplored wilderness attributed to the Makay does not align with their reality but rather represents an imagined construct that caters to the potential tourism and scientific research opportunities.

The current portrayal of the Makay as a realm of untamed discovery, untouched and in its pristine state, undermines the lived experiences and profound connection the Beronono Bara have with this landscape. It disregards their sense of belonging within the Makay and their intricate understanding. It embodies what Cronon calls the "flight from history," negating the rich historical fabric interwoven with the land and its people.

People: stereotyped, exoticised and rediscovered

The Bara people of Madagascar find themselves entangled in a web of stereotypes and exoticised portrayals. They are often labelled as "fierce warriors" and "wild individuals" by those outside the Bara community. Non-Bara Malagasy frequently ascribe such stereotypes to them, using adjectives like "ill-tempered" and "uneducated." Among civil servants and the educated urban elite, a more restrained form of stereotyping characterises the Bara as "unpredictable" and "socially or economically underdeveloped." These depictions are closely linked to the Bara's agro-pastoral economy, centred around the rearing of zebu cattle, which serves as their primary source of income. Animal husbandry holds social, cultural, and political significance, rooted in ancestral customs. The perception of the Bara as socially and economically underdeveloped and unpredictable is intertwined with the Malaso tradition, which has undergone evolution and now exerts strain not only on Bara communities but also on the existing political and economic structures that revolve around the highly valued zebu commodity.

As Salazar argues, these representations are not accidental but shaped by power dynamics and social-political relations. He highlights the influence of "tourist imaginaries," emphasising that when people embark on any form of tourism, they bring a set of expectations derived from various sources. This prior information diminishes uncertainty and mitigates risks, yet it also serves as a mechanism of control that channels tourist experiences into predetermined forms. Salazar elucidates how social practices, ideologies, and behaviours stemming from tourism imaginaries subtly influence individuals' engagement with the "Other" (Salazar 2011: 867-877).

As discussed earlier, stereotypical descriptions reinforce the existing social hierarchy that places the Bara at the bottom of the Malagasy social capital and prestige. Interestingly, anthropology has observed that stereotyping allows the receiving group to redefine their position concerning the perceived "Other" (Eriksen 1993). A case in point is the Embera community in Panama, which has successfully subverted previous exotification and capitalised on it (Theodossopoulous 2016). They have transformed from being stereotyped as primitive to being celebrated by tourists and even the Panamanian government officials in the tourism sector. They now receive admiration and attention for their cultural distinctiveness, a quality that was previously used to justify their discrimination (Bunten and Graburn eds. 2018:110).

These anthropological insights highlight the potential for indigenous tourism to enable indigenous communities to renegotiate the referents of their stereotyping, enhance their self-presentation, and articulate their cultural identity. Similar dynamics can be seen emerging within the Beronono Bara community.

The Makay Tourism venture can be understood through two dimensions. Firstly, broader imaginaries perpetuate the exoticisation of the Bara, relying on historical narratives or present-day events that reinforce old and new stereotypes. Such descriptions provide an opening for external agencies to establish their businesses and research projects within the Makay. Labels like "uneducated," "ill-tempered," and "socially
underdeveloped" create an assumption that companies and NGOs need to intervene in Bara territory because the Bara are seen as incapable of doing so themselves. In Chapter 5, my conversation with Rintsamahefa, who works for the Madagascar division of UNESCO, exemplifies the reception of Bara stereotypes within official circles. It should be noted that Rintsamahefa may not personally endorse these stereotypes, but the prevailing imaginaries in Madagascar tend to align with such descriptions of the Bara.

The second dimension revolves around the Tourist Economy. The Beronono Bara's involvement in tourism endeavours challenges the status quo and confronts the prevailing imaginaries. It allows the Bara to establish themselves as authentic tourism entrepreneurs, transcending the stereotypes imposed upon them. More importantly, by engaging in their enterprise within deep Bara territory, the Beronono Bara elevate their position in present and future discussions concerning the Makay. They become dignified social actors within the broader political economy of the tourism industry.

Thrilling Encounters: The Makay and the Appeal of Danger

In tourism, the Bara narrative offers a readily accessible and marketable allure. It caters to the imagination and expectations of thrill seekers, adventurers, and those seeking the exhilaration of the uncharted, the untamed, and an element of danger. Makay tourists willingly embrace this sense of danger, emerging unscathed and unfazed on the other side. According to the self-promoted Bara stereotype, the ultimate achievement for tourists is to "survive" the experience, creating tales worthy of retelling.

"dark tourism," initially coined by Lenon and Foley (2004) to describe tourist sites associated with death and disaster, has gained prominence in late modernity. Tony Seaton prefers the term "Thanatourism," highlighting the contemplation of death and dying (2009:527) and emphasizing that the fascination with death is not exclusive to the late/post-modern era. Regardless of the terminology, this tourism serves a direct purpose, as tourists seek personal proximity to danger. The current appeal of dark tourism reflects our modern reflexive risk society, where death and disaster have become normalized (Jonathan Skinner 2012:10). Skinner aptly observes that we have become "junkies" of the extreme, shaped by a culture that embraces extreme travel pursuits, leisure practices, and behaviours (2012:9).

The notion of danger in tourism warrants exploration, as it adds an intriguing dimension to the travel experience. Several scholars have delved into the intersection of danger, violence, and travel, shedding light on the phenomenon of "danger-zone tourists." Kathleen Adams, for instance, describes these travellers as individuals who venture into politically turbulent areas not for professional purposes but for leisure (Minca and Oakes 2006:208). Elizabeth Garland aptly captures the motivation behind such journeys, stating, "By travelling to them [dangerous places]... the prospect of encountering and surviving danger - or at least a bit of 'excitement' - motivates us to leave home in the first place" (1999:B5).

Consider Jonathan Skinner's account of "Walking the Falls" (2016), where tourists immerse themselves in the politically charged environment of West Belfast. Here, they forge an intimate connection with the shared history narrated by a Republican ex-prisoner serving as their tour guide. Despite his nationalist ideology, the guide's firsthand experiences further captivate the audience (26). The

tensions between the Protestant and Republican communities amplify the interest in such dark tours (27). In Madagascar, the equivalent avenue for tourists to feel intimate proximity to danger is through night journeys by coach. The security situation of these journeys is increasingly volatile, so the national tourism board advises against travelling by coach during the night. However, 'adrenaline junkies' and thrill seekers are drawn to the prospect of experiencing the perils of night journeys in Madagascar, defying the authorities recommendations. They can be seen embarking on these routes known for highway banditry, either alone or in pairs. Whether it is the creation of risk narratives as a form of traveller's capital, as suggested by Torun Elsrud (2001), or the "co-subject construction" driving dark tourism, as described by Jonathan Skinner (2018), the desire for the darker side of tourism is undeniably on the rise. Sites marred by historical atrocities or natural disasters are transformed into commodified packages for tourist consumption.

For travellers venturing into the Makay, the sense of "otherness," of being off the map, forgotten and unexplored, that beckons. This wilderness offers unpredictability, chaos, and disorder, allowing travellers, as Kristin Lozanski writes, to assume a subject position that exists outside the realm of actualized violence (Hazel Andrews ed. 2014). The element of danger arises not only from the stereotyping of the Bara people but also from the exoticization - in terms of adventure narratives - of the tourist itinerary within the Malaso region. It is important to note how, cumulatively, the tourism narrative constructs an imaginary realm of Bara lands that can be moulded and packaged in various ways to cater to the desired ends of tourism marketers, be it eco-tourism, extreme adventures, or even scientific research projects.

While with the Beronono Bara, I encountered a handful of tourists, outsiders, and visitors to the Makay. Among them, Douglas and Richard stood out, as they explicitly expressed being drawn to the Makay by the very allure of these narratives. Douglas explained their motivation, stating, "We were seeking spots in the country that were yet to be discovered by mainstream tourism, and the thrill of exploring the uncharted, coupled with the opportunity to experience the dangers of deep Bara territory, would make for a remarkable story to tell."

Expectations

The Beronono Bara hold a clear and uncomplicated vision for their tourism venture: they aim to establish and maintain their own social and cultural space governed by their customs and traditions while providing an enjoyable experience for tourists and outsiders. Essentially, they seek to create a

"shared space" that respects the local way of life and visitors' expectations. This vision is directly articulated by the Bara individuals involved in tourism, serving as guides or hosts of Bara culture and identity. The Bara anticipates that tourists will not only witness but also immerse themselves in the experience of being part of the tour.

By upholding this expectation of a shared space, the Beronono Bara anticipates generating a sustainable income that will benefit the community and enable the development of additional amenities for tourists and visitors. It includes the construction of separate rest houses to replace makeshift camping sites and a restaurant that can also house a souvenir shop. These improvements will further attract outsiders to the Makay, contributing to the income generated from tourism. Most importantly, by successfully maintaining this shared space, the Beronono Bara will emerge as dignified social actors within the political economy of tourism in Madagascar. They will actively participate in shaping the representation of their socio-cultural identity in local, national, and international tourism discourse.

A crucial element of achieving success in this shared space is the accommodation of outsider expectations. As discussed earlier, the Beronono Bara are aware of the broader imaginaries surrounding the Bara, shaped by a long history of stereotyping. These tourism imaginaries are exploited by the few tourism agencies in Madagascar that include Makay tours in their marketing strategies. However, it is worth noting that organized tours to the Makay through agencies are less standard than encounters with backpackers and solo travellers, who the Beronono Bara are likely to encounter more frequently as their Makay enterprise grows. Hence, a significant focus of my research was to engage with these travellers along the route from the capital city to Bara territory, seeking to understand their perspectives and expectations towards the Bara and the Makay tourism venture. Chapter 5 is dedicated to documenting these encounters, and from my interactions, it became apparent that post-tourists were the most inclined to venture "off the beaten track," seeking unique experiences.

Post-Tourists

Feifer (1985) introduces the concept of "post-tourists" who derive pleasure from the very inauthenticity of the typical tourist experience. These individuals recognize that there is no singular authentic tourist encounter but rather a series of constructed narratives, games, or texts that are playfully unraveled during their journeys (John Urry 1990). Post-tourists have little interest in adhering

to guided tours or joining organized tour groups; instead, they treat such social formations as an integral part of the sight-seeing experience, engaging with a sense of playful irony (Rojek & Urry 2004:62).

It is essential to note an additional aspect of the post-tourist phenomenon in the context of the Makay that has yet to be explored. The post-tourists I encountered in the Makay were less concerned with the spectacle and more focused on the emotional experience it evoked. This "feeling" is subjective and deeply personal for each outsider. Shotter (2003) employs "the feeling of doing" to describe this embodied encounter with a place. Through my conversations with tourists in Madagascar, I discovered that they were often uncertain about what they wanted to feel. Still, they knew they would recognize it when they experienced it. Joanna, whom I spent time with in Tulear, exemplifies the post-tourist who embarks on a journey searching for a specific feeling.
One memorable excursion with Joanna exemplifies this sentiment. With no preconceived expectations or plans, we decided to visit St. Augustine, opting for local transportation. Our motivations were rooted in a desire to be present in the place and allow the experience to unfold organically. While we had a basic understanding of St. Augustine's history, Joanna's primary intention was to immerse herself in the essence of the location, seeking to generate a distinct feeling that arose from the whimsical spontaneity of our unplanned visit.

In pursuing this elusive feeling, post-tourists like Joanna embrace the unpredictability and uncertainty of their travels, allowing them to be fully present in the moment and open to the immersive encounters that await them.

The Art of Slow Travel: Embracing the Journey

On the travels to the Makay from Ranohira, visitors immediately immerse in the essence of "slow travel." The experience of venturing into the heart of the Makay on local transportation encapsulates the concept of a leisurely and unhurried expedition. As Nicky Gardner (2009:10) eloquently describes, "Travel has somehow slipped out of fashion... the pleasure of the journey is eclipsed by anticipation of the arrival. To get there fast is better than to travel slow." In a world characterized by the relentless pace of everyday life, the principles of slow travel and slow tourism stand as rebellious countercurrents, celebrating alternative sources of joy and challenging the hegemony of consumerism (Marzena Kubisz 2015:23).

In contemporary times, a new breed of travellers aspires to belong to the "gone-native class," a group that traverses the globe in search of liberation from the shackles that bind them to specific territories and cultures (Santana Quintana 2015:86). These post-tourists much like Augustine and Joanna, seek to immerse themselves in local customs and adopt the ways of the people they encounter. Their journey is a deliberate process involving assimilation and integration into the fabric of unfamiliar lands. Paul Theroux's work, "The Tao of Travel" (2011), captures the narratives of intrepid travellers who epitomize the epistemological foundations of self-positioning and cultural assimilation.

In this era of fast-paced travel and instantaneous gratification, slow travel offers a precious antidote—a chance to savour each journey step, to revel in the meandering path rather than focusing solely on the destination. It is an invitation to embrace the transformative power of the in-between moments, where connections with people, landscapes, and oneself are nurtured and deepened. As travellers venture into the Makay, they become partakers in this ethos of slow travel, allowing themselves to be captivated by the enchantment of the experience itself.

Unveiling the Alien: Exploring the Makay's Otherness

Within the realm of Makay tourism, there is an undeniable undercurrent of anticipation and fascination with alterity. The allure of an unfamiliar place and a foreign culture permeates the narratives encompassing the tourist experience in this region, as I discovered during my fieldwork.

As we have discussed, the broader imaginaries surrounding the Bara people serve to exoticize and devalue their culture and identity within Madagascar's cultural hierarchy. Consequently, the Makay landscape is positioned as uncharted territory, untouched by the hand of civilization—an entity waiting to be discovered, explored, and encountered. In the eyes of prospective travellers, venturing into the Makay means becoming part of an exclusive group that has experienced this alien place, contrasting it with more popular tourist destinations. Yi-Fu Tuan captures the yearning for alien places among tourists, noting that "in a new setting, they are forced to see and think without the support of a whole world of known sights, sounds, and smells" (1977:146). With limited information circulating about the Makay and the Bara in mainstream channels, the allure of venturing into the unknown becomes a true adventure of the spirit (Santana Quintana 2015:82).

However, it is essential to acknowledge that the notion of the Makay as a distant place is a subjective perspective, exclusively belonging to the outsider. This perception obscures that the Makay is a living, breathing environment inhabited by people. While "post-tourist" narratives may depict the Makay as an alien place due to its non-commercialized nature, they also encompass encounters with the individuals who call it home. Post-tourists seek to immerse themselves in the lived reality of this place, for the essence of travel lies in experiencing the vibrant tapestry of the world in all its strangeness and diversity.

The Makay's allure as an alien place resides in the unexplored, the unfamiliar, and the untamed. Yet, it is essential to peel back the layers of exoticism to recognize that behind the veil of otherness lies a rich tapestry of lived experiences and a community intimately connected to this unique environment. As outsiders venture into the Makay, they must be willing to embrace the duality of the alien and the real, for it is in this intricate dance that the true essence of the Makay unfolds.

Authenticity: Unraveling the Narrative

The notion of authenticity revolves around preserving a way of life that has remained untouched by the forces of globalization. It is the living embodiment of a continuous thread that stretches back to a distant past. However, as Eric Wolf states, no society exists in isolation or a static, unchanging form. This realization has led anthropology to embrace the diversity of conceptualizations surrounding authenticity. Scholars have explored authenticity as verisimilitude, genuineness, originality, and the authority to authenticate (Bruner 1994: 309-401).

In the realm of tourism, authenticity takes on different forms. There is what Selwyn terms "hot" authenticity, which appeals to those who seek a social, immersive experience, and "cool" authenticity, which appeals to those who seek knowledge about the authentic (Selwyn 1996: 7, 20-21). MacCannel (1976) highlights how tourists often desire an authenticity untainted by modernity, an unadulterated glimpse into the backstage of a cultural performance. Paradoxically, these seekers of hidden authenticity may inadvertently contaminate the essence they yearn for, falling into what Theodossopoulos calls the "trap of authenticity" (2013: 344).

In the context of Bara tourism, the authenticity conversation is still in its infancy. From my observations, the Bara people appear less preoccupied with the concept of authenticity than their foreign visitors. However, tourism acts as a catalyst for reviving Bara culture, not only for their own

sake but also for the outsiders who come to visit. The tourists question the narrative presented during the tour—the chosen path, the visited sites, and even the forbidden places. All these elements weave together to create a sense of tradition, custom, and the interpretation of the landscape. Through this lens, the question of authenticity intersects with the Makay tourism venture.

Authenticity in Makay tourism entails unravelling the narrative that surrounds the experience. It invites us to explore the interplay between tradition and modernity, the constructed and the genuine, as we venture into a realm where the Bara culture and outsiders' expectations converge.

Embarking on a journey to another indigenous group which I often use as a point of comparison, let's glimpse at the Embera community in Panama. Faced with restrictions imposed by establishing a national park in 1985, they sought to preserve their way of life through cultural tourism (Thoedossopoulos 2012:124). Dance, a cherished aspect of their culture that was slowly fading away, became their chosen vehicle for communicating their traditions to outsiders. Through their involvement in tourism, the Embera community experienced a resurgence of pride and identity, particularly in their newfound confidence as dancers. This transformation was so profound that they now view themselves as cultural ambassadors, recognizing their responsibility to represent their heritage (Theodossopoulos 2018:109).

The introduction of tourism has not only changed the history of discrimination against the Embera but also empowered them to become educators. Through tourism, they have honed their teaching skills, enabling them better to transmit their culture to outsiders (ibid 2018:109). In this context, the unquestionably authentic element is the tourists' desire to learn about Embera culture. This desire, in turn, triggers a cascade of authentic responses from the local community. Through this ongoing participation and engagement, indigenous tourism breathes new life into traditions, revitalizes cultural practices, and reconceptualizes how communities interact with the world.

In previous chapters, I highlighted that posing the question of what is authentic to the Beronono Bara is essentially futile. Their way of life is deeply intertwined with their ancestral customs, known as the 'Fomban-draza.' However, as I discussed in Chapter 5, the increasing presence of Vazaha (foreigners) and tourism has led to a detachment of the younger generation from the Fomban-draza. This sentiment was echoed by Antoine, who emphasized the transformation undergone by the Bara in the towns along the highway. It brings to mind the point I made in Chapter 1 about the limitations of anthropology in constraining indigenous groups within historical comparisons. Arkana and Antoine

are not incorrect in observing these changes within the modern Bara community. It reinforces the notion that the contemporary Bara are not a monolithic entity but a diverse and varied collection of groups and communities expressing their traditions and customs uniquely. To pinpoint a specific place in Bara country where one could find an authentic Bara experience is, as Theodossopoulos aptly describes it, falling into the "trap of authenticity."

In response to the preconceived notions placed upon them, the Beronono Bara have chosen to defy expectations. Empowered by the potential of their tourism enterprise and driven by a profound respect for their ancestors, they approach the venture with a remarkable blend of tradition and modernity. Despite the need for significant support from national tourism boards or agencies, the Beronono Bara demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit. Through my fieldwork experiences with the Beronono Bara, it becomes evident that their extensive knowledge of the Makay region challenges the narrative of it being an unexplored and pristine wilderness. Similarly, the concept of authenticity remains fluid and elusive, much like the prevailing imaginaries. The Beronono Bara inhabit a rugged and isolated territory, living in a self-contained manner. However, it is essential to note that their authenticity should not be measured solely by their adherence to historical Bara customs and practices. They consciously chose their way of life and could have embraced an entirely different path while honouring their ancestral traditions. It is precisely why the notion of authenticity does not resonate with the Beronono Bara.

"Bridging Narratives: Meeting Grounds of Bara Tourism Complexity"

The vast expanse of the Makay region holds within it the transformative potential for the Beronono Bara. Here, they can seize the opportunity to empower themselves, to become active participants in a global endeavour where they can shape, direct, and own their enterprise. In this act, their subaltern status finds a voice, allowing them to engage in conversations about politics and representations once denied to them. Through this newfound agency, the Beronono Bara can weave a narrative deeply rooted in their identity, history, and collective expression.

The introduction of tourism in the Makay brings forth a fresh avenue for the Beronono Bara to showcase their way of life to foreign visitors. It presents an alternative narrative, one that stands in contrast to the narratives perpetuated by tourism and the historical discrimination faced by the Bara. This thesis delves into the burgeoning tourism industry in the Makay, where the Beronono Bara have emerged as key players, their voices gaining recognition. Their narrative takes root in the receptive

soil of post-tourists, individuals who display a heightened awareness of the constructed imaginaries surrounding the Bara and can distinguish between narratives fabricated by tourism and those grounded in local truths.

During my initial observations in Madagascar, the tourist experience seemed unremarkable. Most visitors followed predefined itineraries dictated by tour agencies or popular travel guides like 'Lonely Planet.' When venturing into Bara territory, most would head straight to Isalo National Park, often staying in Ranohira as a temporary stop before immersing themselves in the park's natural wonders. Their expectations revolved around experiencing Bara tourism without necessarily encountering the local politics intertwined with the region's tourism industry.

However, it was the post-tourists who sought something more profound. They actively sought out the Bara people's responses to tourism, recognizing the broader narratives that exoticize and stereotype the Bara, borne out of a complex political history and the booming tourism market in Madagascar. In their quest for enlightenment, these post-tourists empathize with the local Bara's reactions, viewing them as counter-narratives that prompt introspection about their own positions and challenge the official accounts.

In the meeting grounds of Makay tourism, the Beronono Bara begin to reclaim their voice, shaping their narrative and countering the prevailing imaginaries. This thesis aims to shed light on their transformative journey and the rich tapestry of stories they weave as they navigate the dynamic landscape of tourism, reclaiming their cultural representation and embarking on a path of emancipation.

The burning of Isalo's national forests immediately triggered assumptions that attributed the act to the Bara agricultural practice of slash and burn. In its efforts for conservation and eco-tourism, the government aimed to eradicate this practice. Disappointment permeated the minds of tourists who encountered the scorched landscapes of Isalo, with some viewing it as a confirmation of stereotypes surrounding the Bara people—labels of being uneducated and wild. Few were willing to explore alternative perspectives beyond the notion of slash and burn, accepting the explanations provided by their tour guides, often affiliated with Madagascar National Parks or endorsed by the national tourism board, as the sole truth of the matter.

Compounding the issue was the Malaso, whose actions often made national headlines, further fueling the scepticism surrounding local Bara voices in the narrative. Tourists found it challenging to consider that the burning of Isalo Forest could possess more profound political implications rather than simply being a tradition for the Bara. However, my conversations with post-tourists delved into legitimate inquiry, engaging with the local Bara responses to the Isalo fire. Through these discussions, we explored the social and cultural status of the Bara, the economic inequities perpetuated by contemporary tourism, and the intricate politics surrounding tourism in the Bara region.

For post-tourists, such contemplations allowed for reflection, re-engagement, and a deeper understanding of Bara tourism through the eyes of the local people. The Isalo fire became a pivotal point of exploration, disrupting the expectations of tourists like Alena, who sought the spectacle of wildlife encounters. Confronted with the realities of eco-tourism, Alena was aware that not all communities within the region would benefit from tourism profits. However, the deliberate sabotage of Isalo National Park raised questions about how tourism inequalities exacerbated local divisions and conflicts. Alena departed Isalo with newfound knowledge, encountering a facet of Bara life that she would not have discovered through official tourism literature alone. Her previous expectations regarding eco-tourism considerations of the diverse realities within the Bara communities now wavered, prompting an interrogation of the ethics surrounding eco-tourism in her mind.

Post-tourists approach the narratives presented by local experiences with an understanding that goes beyond authenticity and cultural ambiguities. They embrace the movement toward self-representation, allowing locals to share their way of life with outsiders. In the context of Makay, this expectation of post-tourism is tested through the intricate complexity of the tourism encounter.

This thesis is an invitation to reflect upon the power dynamics inherent in the tourism industry and to consider the transformative potential it holds for communities like the Beronono Bara. It is a call to recognize and celebrate the agency of local communities in shaping their narratives, challenging the manufactured imaginaries imposed upon them.

As I conclude this chapter of my research, I do so with a profound appreciation for the resilience and determination of the Beronono Bara. Their pursuit of self-empowerment through tourism is an inspiration, reminding us that cultural heritage is not static but a living, breathing entity capable of adapting and evolving with the changing tides of time.
May this thesis serve as a testament to their indomitable spirit and a catalyst for dialogue and action—a step towards a future where tourism is not only a vehicle for economic growth but also a force that

nurtures cultural pride, fosters mutual understanding, and empowers communities to reclaim their narratives.

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