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Seeds of Resistance: Civil Society Organisations, Land Rights and Food Sovereignty in Madagascar

A Participatory Research with VOIALA-Madagascar on Communities' Resistance to Large Scale Land Acquisition Deals in Haute Matsiatra, Madagascar

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By

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To the Communities
I have called Home,

in Sápmi, Madagascar and Kent,

that welcomed me

with their wealth
of Generous Hearts and Inspiring Minds

George Orwell wrote in 1944 in the UK:

> *"Stop to consider how the so-called owners of the land got hold of it. They simply seized it by force, afterwards hiring lawyers to provide them with title-deeds. In the case of the enclosure of the common lands, which was going on from about 1600 to 1850, the land-grabbers did not even have the excuse of being foreign conquerors; they were quite frankly taking the heritage of their own countrymen, upon no sort of pretext except that they had the power to do so."* [1]

[1] Orwell, George *(18 August 1944).* "On the Origins of Property in Land"*. cooperativindividualism.org. Archived from* the original *on 4 November 2010*. Retrieved 4 March 2012. [Accessed 08/05/18]

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Abstract

In Madagascar, as in a large number of other countries, vast areas of community land are being leased or sold to foreign investors, often with the support of the state at a regional level. Large-scale land acquisition deals (LLAD) constitute a multifaceted phenomenon severely impacting land tenure and food systems. These land deals represent a significant challenge for indigenous and local communities when it comes to securing local land sovereignty and sustaining local livelihoods over time. Justified by the international narratives of scarcity (of food and fuel sources), supported by the World Bank and neoliberal globalist policies, LLADs are typically undertaken by foreign investors and multinational corporations to secure control over means of capital accumulation and create development.

Communities often lack bargaining power and means to demonstrate and secure land property. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) can play a determining role in supporting communities' claims and responses to LLADs in their territories. CSOs can facilitate topographic and legal support, training and media coverage. They can produce research and information on LLADs which is both relevant and accessible to the communities. They can mediate the communities' relations with investors and state institutions. They can improve communication among the stakeholders. Lastly, they can fuel and support the emergence of local social movements for food sovereignty and counter-enclosure.

This thesis sheds light on how local CSOs in the region of Haute Matsiatra, Madagascar, can support communities in facing and preventing LLADs. Through interviews and participant observation this research investigated what kind of CSOs' support is already present and what is needed. This thesis is based on community-based research conducted with the local CSO *VOIALA-Madagascar*.

Key words: large-scale land acquisition deals; land rights; civil society organisations; land rights; food sovereignty.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CS	Civil Society
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
IPACC	Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LDPI	Land Deal Politics Initiative
LLAD	Large Scale Land Acquisition Deal
LO	Local Organisation
REDD+	Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and environmental Degradation
UN	United Nations
UNDRIP	United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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Preface

Carrying the burden of my Ancestors: Research as a 'dirty' word

As a non-Indigenous, white European Master's student trained in the UK and in Norway, and raised in Italy, I found myself reflecting and questioning my role as a researcher in Indigenous Studies over and over again. More to that, working on my research project has been a way to challenge my assumptions on the way knowledge is created and constructed, both inside and outside academia. Indigenous Studies has been to me, and continues to be, a journey into understanding both my history and culture as 'Westerner' and European, and different ways of being and knowing.

I am using the term 'Westerner' to express how my identity has been shaped by what Margaret Kovach refers to as 'Western' in her *Indigenous Methodologies*, that is "a particular ontological, epistemological, sociological, and ideological way of thinking and being as differentiate from Eastern thought, an Indigenous worldview, and so forth" (2009: 21).
My own identity has never felt as much of a burden in my previous academic experience as it does now after having critically looked at how the legacies of Eurocentrism and colonialism are still shaping the present. And yet, I regard the uneasiness caused by addressing how these two historical processes have affected billions of lives and dictated the production of knowledge as an essential process. Such process has been central to me not just as a researcher but first and foremost as an individual.

Still, as Kovach, I understand Western thought as neither monolithic nor static, and I acknowledge its remarkable diversity and contributions (Kovach 2009). Far from rejecting altogether the cultural milieu that has shaped me, both academically and non, I embraced those aspects of Western thought that do not dismiss nor subjugate *the other,* and I decided to seek common ground built on similarities and mutual respect rather than focusing on incompatibility. Hence, I attempted in my work to draw upon both Indigenous Methodologies and European academic and philosophical traditions, which have gradually defined the way I look at the world.

Whilst working on my research project I often found myself thinking about what Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's claimed about 'research', when she referred to it as "probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (Smith 2012:1). Behind Smith's claim there is the acknowledgment of how, historically, research went hand in hand with the colonial agenda. Academic endeavours were for a long time characterised by an underlying social Darwinism (Kovach 2010). This was succinctly expressed in the formula 'classify and conquer', forged by the forefather of comparative Religious Studies and imperial theorist Max Müller (1873).

Although we have come a long way since Müller's imperialist claims, especially following the various waves of Post-colonialist, Neo-Marxist, Post-modernist, Feminist and Critical theories, decolonisation and equality-building are all but completed projects (Smith 2012: ; Kovach 2009: 75-76). In light of the above, in the process of choosing, designing and writing up this work my focus has been all along on taking distance from research which gave research itself its bad reputation. Hence, I aimed to produce research which was conducted *with* people and not simply *on* people; was relevant to the people involved; provided a platform for voices which are not often heard; and critically looked at structures, dimensions and aspects of power as they emerged during fieldwork. Further, this thesis critically addressed how certain narratives and logics stemming from neoliberalism impact communities on the local level (more specifically, the grand narratives of scarcity and the need for intensive modes of food production; the old myth of *terra nullius* and the logic of the accumulation of capital. This was done whilst being aware of the legacy of Madagascar's colonial past and the ways this affected power relations and the understanding of governance and knowledge production in the Malagasy political arena.

1 Introduction

When in January 2017 the work of the community-based indigenous organisation *VOIALA-Madagascar* came to my knowledge through the Slow Food network, I decided to approach them with the intention to find out more about their role as a local organisation engaged in environmental conservation and the protection of traditional livelihoods in rural Madagascar. *VOIALA* is a non-for-profit organisation led by and involving self-defined indigenous peoples and minority groups. For more than a decade it has been engaging in local development and conservation practices such as reforestation and community gardens. It works alongside both the academic and the rural community. *VOIALA* receives funding from international partners, especially Italian ones. For this reason the president Sahondra and the former president Heritiana were both fluent in Italian and had visited Italy before as representatives of Slow Food Madagascar (Slow Food was established in Italy, and there it still has its headquarters).

This thesis is based on two months of participatory research conducted with *VOIALA* in Summer 2017. Fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews and participant observation in the region of Haute Matsiatra among communities whose land was the object of corporate land deals; local civil society organisations (CSOs) supporting community land rights and local politicians. Our intention was to find out more on how *VOIALA* could best support local communities facing controversies over land, as well as to gain insight into the phenomenon of large-scale land acquisition deals (LLAD) in the region. The main premise guiding my analysis of the data gathered with *VOIALA* was that communities which have a history of tenancy in a given area and have maintained a relationship with this environment over generations possess inherent right and intrinsic capacity to manage and maintain that land. This is given by prolonged exposition and relation to the local environment.

With *VOIALA* we believed that CSOs could contribute to local communities' struggles to achieve better participation in decisions affecting land deals and local self-determination. During and initial conversation Heritiana Andriamalala, member and former president of *VOIALA*, summed up the concerns of the organisations as follows

> *"I am worried about communities who do not receive any support from religious institutions and local organisations. Yes, an organisation like VOIALA could certainly function as a bridge between local communities and institutions, but*

unfortunately we do not have the means to reach out to those communities which are the most in need. We ought to understand how we can support the most vulnerable and poorest communities if we are to protect these and the environments where they live".

Inspired by these intentions *VOIALA* and I set out to find out more about some LLADs cases in the three villages of Andonaka, Ankaramena and Ivoamba, in the region Haute Matsiatra. Haute Matsiastra, is a region of South-west Madagascar characterised by plentiful natural resources and rich and varied ecosystems that include high dry plateaus and moist deciduous forests. Such richness has over the last few decades attracted the interest of foreign investors seeking land intended mainly for agribusiness and mineral extraction, occasionally paired with the pursuit of development goals as envisaged by the Malagasy state.

Communities often lack bargaining power and means to demonstrate and secure land property. Through interviews and participant observation conducted in the three villages, this research investigated what kind of CSOs' support is already present and what is needed.

1.1 The Setting: LLADs in Madagascar

Among the communities, the members of *VOIALA* and the other CSOs I interviewed the general trend was to refer to the land deals happening in the region as 'land-grabbing'. However, in trying to better understand the phenomenon as being made of a variety of stakeholders with different understandings of the rationale and the objectives behind the deals, I decided to adopt the less loaded terminology of large-scale land acquisition deals. More specifically, I relied on the definition given by White et al. which describes LLADs as "the large-scale acquisition of land or land-related rights and resources by corporate (business, non-profit or public) entities" (White, et al., 2012). More specifically, this thesis deals with LLADs cases pertaining to the agribusiness sector.

Since the early 2000s, Madagascar has experienced an increased interest from foreign investment, particularly from companies interested in purchasing land or obtaining long term concessions (Widman 2014; Evers et al. 2011). Illustrative is the case of the South Korean group Daewoo Logistics, which set up a deal with the Malagasy government for a 99-year lease of 1.3m hectares of land (Burnod et al. 2013; Evers et al. 2011). Such deal was not preceded by

any consultation with the civil society, and in particular with the local communities who would see their right to access and use of the land being threatened by the concession. Shortly after the deal became public, in 2009 a coup shook the political and economic stability of Madagascar. The Daewoo case appears to have played a crucial role in the process that led up to the coup, as it caused a huge uprising across the country, in turn used by the entering leader to gain consent and support (Evers, et al., 2011). Following 2009, the newly installed government cancelled the deal after declaring it unconstitutional. Several similar cases, on a smaller scale are still occurring. Similar land acquisitions by private investors negotiated between 2005 and 2009 were also halted. And yet large-scale land acquisition deals (LLAD) are still common all over the country. This phenomenon is part of the bigger picture of large-scale acquisition of land occurring in several areas of the world, and in notably in several countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.

The phenomenon described above needs to be understood in the context of the island's colonial past. As a former French colony, Madagascar inherited from the colonisers a state ownership land tenure system which was inspired by the Australian Torrens Act. According to the Act, the state is the presumed owner of the land, and use of such land is by the same state granted through titles. Moreover, conflicts and misunderstandings often arise in the encounter between the sphere of state positive law and legislation (*lex fori*), and that of the local customary law (*lex loci*). This is due to the fact that the two forms of legal frameworks are based on different traditions, cultural values and governance systems . (S. J. Evers, 2013).

The confusion over who has right to what is often exploited more or less consciously by foreign developers in the sectors of agribusiness and mining looking out for unexploited natural capital. And yet, what appears to be 'unexploited natural capital' to some, may constitute the main source of livelihood for others, accessed and managed over time based on customary law and local knowledge. In addition, even where the state or the investors wish to bring development for the good the community, conflicting views on what constitutes development and the ways to achieve it may bring about conflict.. This is often due to incommunicability and irreconcilability between differing worldviews and systems of governance. Such scenarios are worsened by the absence or inadequacy of effective mechanisms to realise local consultation and consent. In fact, often LLADs lack free, prior and informed consent, and an evaluation of the environmental impact, despite the fact that in Madagascar such evaluation would legally require consultation with the local population.

Hence, in Madagascar corporate land deals constitute yet another challenge for local and indigenous communities in a context fraught with political instability following the coup in 2009, conditions of extreme poverty and the dire consequences of climate change and deforestation. Many in Madagascar fear that the Malagasy may eventually become stateless on their land due to the liberalisation of foreign investments. There is general apprehension that if left unregulated LLADs will continue to favour foreigners investors rather than locals[2]. The sociologist Rabarihoelina has warned against the FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) policy of the Malagasy state, and advocated for a comeback to the Malagasy value of land sacredness, to an understanding of ancestral land as a gift[3].

1.2 Purpose and Relevance

The purpose of this thesis was manifold. On the one hand the research conducted with *VOIALA* aimed to provide relevant information for local civil society organisations (CSOs) wishing to offer support to local and indigenous communities. More specifically, I wanted to find out how local CSOs could best serve the interests of local communities' in the context of land tenure security. And particularly, how they could function as a bridge in the encounter between local communities and other stakeholders such as the state and private investors. Underlying the research objectives was the idea that communities should be equal partners in participating or refusing LLADs, and their opinions, belief systems and customary law should all be incorporated in the project planning.

VOIALA and myself investigated if, and which, forms of resistance were triggered by LLADs among local communities. Simultaneously, this thesis was an initial effort to produce more research on local CSOs and the nature of their work in supporting local communities. The idea behind this thesis was to provide *VOIALA* with insights into its viable contribution to local communities in their responses to land deals. Due to their links and intimate knowledge of the local contexts local CSOs commonly prove to be the most effective in providing services and supporting indigenous and rural communities. Yet, as my experience with *VOIALA* has showed me, local organisations are also the ones who struggle the most with obtaining funding. In a

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[2] https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/27933 [Accessed: 03/05/18]

[3] Ibid.

country like Madagascar, in the absence of a welfare state and due to the limited availability of state support to the civil society, international funding is generally the only source of financial support that CSOs can rely on. However, international funding tends to be allocated to more well-established and larger international NGOs for reasons of reliability and credibility. My intention in this thesis is to contribute to the understanding and the appreciation of the importance of the endeavours undertaken by local CSOs. By emphasising the importance of their impact I hope to contribute to local CSOs' credibility and to inspire greater trust in their work.

As concluded by Ben White et al., in response to LLADs "[p]ainstaking local community organisation and mobilisation work is perhaps the most urgent and difficult challenge" (2012: 636). This thesis situates itself within a research gap on local CSOs' unique contributions to local organisation and mobilisation.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question that this study sought to answer was:

How can local civil society organisations support communities' claims to land rights in the context of large-scale land acquisition deals?

More specifically, what kind of support is already present and what seems to be lacking? Can civil society organisation effectively help communities get their claims across and their voices heard? These questions were asked in order to provide relevant information for local organisations wishing to offer support to communities in getting their voices heard on the way their land is managed and its tenure regulated. Furthermore, we attempted to identify local forms of resistance and tried to understand if, and how CSOs were involved in these.

With *VOIALA* we tried to understand who were actors involved, as well as to gain insight into their different agendas. This was done by asking about their views on the deals and on the local development they envisaged. More specifically, members of the community were asked whether they would have accepted the deals if they had more say in designing and managing the projects. This question was asked in order to investigate to what extent the conflicts that had arisen in Andonaka, Ankaramena and Ivoamba had stemmed from exclusion from decision-

making due to a lack of communities' consultation on, and participation in the decision making processes behind LLADs. Or rather, from divergences on the specifics of the projects themselves.

The local dimension of the cases in the Haute Matsiatra region is in conversation with the broader global economic and political narratives generating and justifying LLADs. Hence, these cases were investigated against the backdrop of the available literature on the global phenomenon of agribusiness LLADs.

1.4 Indigeneity in Africa and Madagascar

The Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC) states that Indigenous peoples in Africa commonly share a bundle of characteristics including: 'political and economic marginalisation rooted in colonialism' ; discrimination and exclusion from education and healthcare; a locally embedded knowledge, culture and economy; distinct physical traits from the dominant societies[4]. To date in Madagascar the Mikea hunter-gatherer people of the Mikea forest region are the only legally recognised Indigenous people as defined by the Operational Directive 4.20 of the World Bank (Huff, 2012). According to the census data there are eighteen official ethnic groups in Madagascar, and no listed minorities[5]. This is often the case in the African context. In fact, it has been mainly hunter-gatherers and herding peoples who have associated themselves with the UN to obtain affirmative recognition based on UNDRIP[6], or received recognition of their distinct Indigenous identity from state institutions and international bodies.

Further, the seminal Cobo report suggested that Indigenous peoples "form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity" (E/1982/34, 1982). In fact, in Madagascar there would appear to be several groups reflecting the characteristics given above, descendants of the peoples who historically made up distinct kingdoms previous to Merina[7] and then French rule (Evers, et al., 2013).

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[4] Ibid. 3
[5] Minority Rights Group International, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples-Madagascar*, August 2009, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4954ce68a.html [Accessed 3 May 2018]
[6] From https://www.ipacc.org.za/en/africa's-indigenous-people.html [Accessed 5 May 2018]
[7] The Merina people established their rule in a vast area of central Madagascar between 1790 and 1895. "The Merina kingdom shared many characteristics of Southern African kingdoms of the

Sidsel Saugestad has dealt extensively with the topic of indigeneity in the African context and she has observed how, generally speaking, in the African setting, "[t]he most acute dilemma ... is not how an indigenous group is defined, but the fact that most national governments ignore, reject or are downright antagonistic to the very concept [of indigenous]"(Saugestad in Bardard eds. 2001: 299). Saugestad has remarked the implications of the dimension of time, or better, of a sense of continuity. This, she suggested, is expressed by a 'continued use of land', as well as by a 'clear sense of having been *deprived* of previous access and use' (in Barnard e Kenrick 2001: 6). Her considerations mainly point to the relational aspect of the definition of indigenous, that is to peoples' relation to the colonial institutions first, and to the state and the international development and economic fora subsequently:

> "*[t]he dominant position of white colonial forces left all of black Africa in a subordinate position that in many respects was similar to the position of indigenous peoples elsewhere. In relation to the colonial powers all native Africans were (a) first comers, (b) non-dominant and (c) different in culture from the white intruders. Moreover, local people were associated with 'nature' and 'traditional lifestyles', which are common indigenous attributes, in contrast to the control of technology, manufacturing and development, which was associated with the intruders*"
>
> (in Barnard & Kenrick 2001: 3-4).

Deprivation and disenfranchisement of rural communities, and especially of hunter-gathers and pastoralists has been, and continues to be paired with stigmatisation. In many cases these groups are still regarded by post-independent African states as 'backward' and, in the best case, 'unproductive' (Saugestad in Barnard e Kenrick 2001). Following Saugestad (in Barnard e Kenrick 2001) in this thesis I am going to use the concept of 'indigenous' as a descriptor of inequality and as a tool to act upon this inequality. To Saugestad the indigenous struggle seeks to "challenge the dominant rules of society, whereby culturally specific qualifications and skills are rewarded differently, consistently leaving the minority in a disadvantaged position" (Barnard e Kenrick 2001:8). In the context of the cases presented by this thesis this means being critical of the type of social and economic development that the Malagasy state wishes to

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nineteenth century, including expansion and incorporation of new societies, diplomatic and military alliances with Britain as a sort of secondary empire, and the struggles of elites to retain power in an increasingly pluralistic and interested political environment in which opponents sought both domestic and foreign allies" (Larson, 1996).

impose on rural communities by engaging in LLADs, and forms of development that typically are neither culturally specific nor locally embedded.

1.5 Neoliberal Land and Foreign Investment Policy

The *Nouvelle Lettre de Politique Foncière* 2015-2030 (New Land Policy Bill, issued by the Malagasy government) in summing up the government's land tenure policy posits secured access to land – for both men and women – as an essential condition towards the achievement of 'sustainable socio-economic development open to investment and embedded in the local social dynamics'[8] (my translation from the French version). The land policy presented in the *Lettre* is meant to contribute, among other things, to 'food sovereignty' and 'extension of household agriculture'[9]. Simultaneously though, the state has been encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI), despite this could in fact constitute a threat to Malagasy land users (Evers, et al. 2011; Evers, Campbell e Lambek 2013). The country is facing important challenges around the issue of food security, and FDI paired with LLADs is often regarded as indispensable in order to address food and fuel scarcity. As to 2016, an estimated 1.2 million people were reported 'food insecure' in Madagascar[10].

The FAO has regularly run emergency programmes to tackle food insecurity aggravated by El Niño-induced drought and other frequent natural disasters such as cyclones and locust threats[11]. A further argument connected to the food scarcity narrative which plays in favour to LLADs is the idea that a vastness of idle and unexploited wasteland is currently available and should be allocated to agricultural development. I equate this argument to the myth of *terra nullius* (empty land), which has historically justified land expropriation and all sorts of abuse on Indigenous territories around the world (Coates, 2004). This contemporary expression of the *terra nullius* myth was largely supported by the 2010 World Bank report *Rising Global Interest in Farmland* which called for investment in land and agriculture. In the report a large portion of Sub-Saharan Africa was portrayed as under-utilised and set for an intensification of agricultural productivity (Hall 2011; White, et al. 2012). Phillip McMichael has denounced: "[i]f land grabbing under colonialism was a tragedy, it repeats now as a farce. I argue that this rush to acquire land –

[8] http://www.observatoire-foncier.mg/file-library/LPF-version-finale-aout-2015.pdf [Accessed 08/05/18]
[9] Ibid.
[10] http://www.fao.org/emergencies/countries/detail/en/c/161541/ [Accessed 08/05/18]
[11] Ibid.

however varied (in origin, destination and impact) and inconclusive – is symptomatic of a crisis of accumulation in the neoliberal globalisation project" (McMichael 2012:681). This hegemonic and all-encompassing project has been defined elsewhere by McMichael as

> *"an attempt to fashion the world around a central principle through powerful political and financial institutions"* [heading towards] *"an emerging vision of the world and its resources as a globally organised and managed free trade/free enterprise economy pursued by a largely unaccountable political and economic elite"*
>
> (in White, et al. 2012)

The aforementioned narratives of scarcity and large availability of land, combined with the 2008 global food crisis have prompted large corporate investment in agriculture to gain direct control of food supply chains, as well as to find new sources for speculation of surplus funds, through investments in agriculture (Hall 2011; White, et al. 2012; Koopman 2012; Harvey 2007). Ultimately, the LLADs that international corporate funds are poured into entail absorbing smallholder farmers' and subsistence communities' resources and modes of production into global value chains subjected to corporate control (Hall 2011). David Harvey made a compelling case by arguing that both the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank were the centres "for the propagation and enforcement of 'free market fundamentalism' and neoliberal orthodoxy' " (Harvey 2007). Harvey's argument may not be at all farfetched given that the World Bank's policies have relied heavily on the theories of Hernando De Soto, a strong advocate for capitalisation of developing economies (S. J. Evers 2013: 119) . A market-based rationale aims to "increase beneficiaries' ability to leverage the value of the land and its resources in the marketplace, through, for example, ability to sell the land, use it as collateral, or make capital-intensive investments without fear of losing these" (Vermeulen & Cotula 2012: 900). And yet in this scenario developing economies often have no choice than to be involved in LLADs: as Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has warned "the alternative that is sometimes presented to us [is] either you accept large-scale investments in agriculture, or you deprive yourselves of all investment whatsoever' (quoted in Koopman 2012: 656).

Hence, critically looking at LLADs poses important questions concerning the dominating approaches to economic and social development globally, and how these playout at the local level. What do these really mean to communities and their day-to-day lives? As mentioned

above, LLADs have often been presented as the panacea for food insecurity, as in the case of the World Bank report. Yet, the processes leading up to the realisation of intensive agribusiness projects, and the consequences of these on the social fabric and the environment of rural Madagascar present several issues. The cases presented in this thesis will illustrate some of the issues as they unfolded in the three villages where the interviews were carried out. After having discussed the cases and the role that local CSOs played in supporting and facilitating local resistance I will suggest *VOIALA*'s approach as a form of resistance itself.

1.6 Summary

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction to the topic and the questions dealt with in this thesis. It also presented the themes of LLADs; indigeneity in Africa; and the neoliberal policies that encourage LLADs.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review. Here I present mostly articles published since 2009 as part of the Land Deal Politics Initiative on the *Journal of Peasant Studies*. I also briefly review three papers on CSOs in Africa and Madagascar.

Chapter 3 introduces the context necessary in order to understand the discussion of the case studies. I briefly define civil society, civil society organisations and community. I introduce the main policies regulating land tenure and management in Madagascar (GELOSE; MECIE and the 2005 land titling and certificating regulations). Lastly, I introduce the concept of food sovereignty, which will inform the discussion of *VOIALA's* work.

In *Chapter 4* I present the methodology underlying this thesis. More specifically, I present participatory action research and how it informed my choice of methods and my ethical reflection.

In *Chapter 5* I present and discuss three cases of resistance against to LLADs in the villages of Andonaka, Ankaramena and Ivoamba.

Chapter 6 Deals with the role of CSOs. More specifically, I present the organisations and discuss the type of support offered by *FIANTSO* and *Lamina* to Andonaka, Ankaramena and Ivoamba. The chapter ends with a presentation of *VOIALA* and its unique contribution to community capacity-building and food sovereignty.

Lastly, in *Chapter 7* I conclude by summarising the findings and discussing them against the background of the project of food sovereignty and its potential for the empowerment of local communities.

2 Literature Review

The availability of works on land deals – and 'land -grabs' – is vast and diverse. However, a complete review on the available literature on LLADS is beyond the scope of this thesis. The literature that enabled my understanding and analysis of the phenomenon of LLADs mostly belongs to the field of development studies; agrarian political economy; political ecology; and encompasses the disciplines of political science and anthropology. I relied mainly – although not exclusively – on the work of five authors, namely Hall, White, Borras JR. , Scoones and Wolford, who initiated the Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI) with the objective of promoting engaged and rigorous theoretical and empirical research on land deals. Since 2009 LDPI's papers have been mainly published on the *Journal of Peasant Studies*.

A work that largely contributed to my understanding was 'The new enclosures: critical perspectives on corporate land deals' (White, et al., 2012) . Here, through the lenses of agrarian political economy the authors explored the dynamics of land deals as a global phenomenon, with a focus on labour and property regimes, as well as labour processes and structures of accumulation. Out of comparison of historical 'land grabs' with the contemporary land deals it is argued that the phenomenon is all but a new process. In fact, land grabs often take the form of neo-colonial expropriation and enclosures which echo the processes that occurred in Ireland and Great Britain in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries; the dispossession of First Nations in North America and the three vast African land rushes of 1885-195; 1919-1939, and 1945-1955. A key feature these occurrences all share is the legal manipulation which turned the state into the legal owner of untitled, and yet traditionally occupied and used, lands. White et al. identify six overlapping trends behind the phenomenon of land deals globally, and also deal with the contemporary debate on small-scale versus large-scale farming futures. The contextual trends behind the 'new enclosures' are: the global anticipation of food security; the demand for new forms of resource extraction for fuel security; new environmental imperatives and tools (such as REDD+ and the concept of Ecosystem Services); the establishment of extensive infrastructure corridors and Special Economic Zones funded by IMF, World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank; the creation of new financial instruments with the objective to moderate market risk "while allowing third party investors to profit from the widespread concern that food is running out" (2012: 629). Lastly, the sixth trend concerns the emergence of regulations and incentives which generate both supply and demand in the global resource

rush. These are enshrined in international legal frameworks and enabled by lending programmes and international aid.

The analysis in this thesis was also influenced by 'Governing Global Land Deals: the Role of the State in the Rush for Land' (Wolford, et al., 2013). This essay serves as introduction to a special theme issue produced by the LDPI. It looks at the role of the State by drawing upon concepts and frameworks from political ecology, cultural politics and agrarian studies. The authors sought to unpack the state "to see government and governance as processes, people and relationships". In so doing so they based their discussion on the concepts of territory, sovereignty, authority and subjects "not as static objects but as relationships produced in and through place, property, power and production". The authors suggest that more nuanced analyses are needed to investigate the ways in which power dynamics at different levels and within different functions of a state shape LLADs. They also warn against simplistic understanding of 'land-grabs' as a top-down phenomenon forced upon states by global markets and foreign states.

'Governing Ancestral land in Madagascar: have policy reforms contributed to social justice?' (in Berry et al. eds. 2014) provided me with a good starting point on participation. In dealing with social justice in environmental governance the paper focuses on the dynamics of participation and exclusion. If on the one hand participation could lead to local actors' empowerment, on the other it constitutes a nebulous term which could also refer to practices which have the potential to silence and manipulate less powerful stakeholders. Through a discussion on recent policy reform in Madagascar and a reflection on ancestral land, rights and power in environmental governance, the authors have found that an absent civil society in many areas hinders local capacity to participate, and that legal pluralism often produces a gap between policy and implementation.

Mathilde Gingembre's 'Resistance and participation? Fighting against corporate land access amid political uncertainty in Madagascar' (2015) is part of a collection on responses to land deals 'from below'. It is based on a case study where the municipality of Benala prompted the state institutions to halt further extension of a large-scale biofuel project in a rural area of Southern Madagascar. The paper demonstrates how political uncertainty has the unexpected potential to boost communities' capacity to claim their rights. And yet, it is also shown how the gains obtained in a context of political uncertainty easily end up being brittle and contested.

Gingembre concludes pointing to the fact that in Madagascar consultation processes tend to offer limited room for participation. In order for consultation to enable real participation free, prior and informed consent is necessary. In addition, the heterogeneity of rural societies and complex forms local land tenure need to be taken into account. Further, it is pointed out how "[t]he case of Benala stresses how the externalisation of protest can substantially amplify the echo of local voices " (2015: 581), referring to the mobilisation of transnational activists in support a local counter-enclosure campaign in Benala. That is to say that the external environment to disenfranchised communities, or rather the civil society, can constitute an important resource for social struggles.

'Competition over Authority and Access: International Land Deals in Madagascar' (Burnod, et al., 2013) draws on three case studies to analyse how agribusiness-related land deals affect relations between entities governing land access, and how these shape the deals in turn. The article discusses the implications of legal pluralism for competition occurring between state officials, between state and local actors and the local actors. Among some of the central points made by the authors there is the acknowledgement that local communities need more information of the investment project, and knowledge of their legal rights and the available options to them. In addition, it is suggested that appropriate time should be set aside for negotiations so to allow gradual and capillary diffusion of information and the planning of debates, as well as allowing the stakeholders to obtain external support (civil society organisations, legal advisors, etc.) if needed.

Moving on to the topic of civil society, Stephen Orvis in 'Civil Society in Africa or African Civil Society?' (2001) addresses the concept of civil society in the African context. He urges to look critically at the nature and the potential of CS. By illustrating the debate between what he refers to as the 'optimists' and 'pessimists' in the debate he warns against both the idealization and the dismissing of civil society's potential to support liberal democracy in Africa. By suggesting to "focus on the broad array of collective activity and norms, whether "democratic" or not, that constitute actual existing African civil society" he analyses "patron-client networks, ethnic associations, and some "traditional" authorities as part of civil society" and demonstrates that "African civil society is more rooted in and representative of African society as a whole than the pessimists have admitted, but also less internally democratic and less likely to support liberal democracy than the optimists assert" (Stephen, 2001, p. 17).

‘Civil Society Organisations and Evaluation’ (Chaplowe & Engo-Tjéga, 2007) reviews the concept of CS and develops on its diversity before moving onto the challenges faced by CSOs. Aware of the increased responsibility and expectations of CSOs, the challenges that these face are identified as: limited capacity; difficulty in the outreach to the most marginalized sections of society; inequalities and power relations between CSOs hampering effective participation; CSOs completion and duplication; tendency to scale up; uncooperative state; dependency on donors and unreliable funding. These challenges are presented to better inform international donor-required monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Although the role of civil society organisations emerges as quite determining in the majority of the papers reviewed above, the current available literature in French and English seems to be lacking more in depth discussion on local civil society organisations’ potential to support communities facing land deals in the Malagasy context. However, the former president of *VOIALA*, Heritiana Andriamalala, recently completed a doctoral thesis on the contribution of CSOs in the environmental policy of the Haute Matsiatra region. In his article *Rôle et place de la société civile dans la mise en œuvre de la politique environnementale, cas des associations et organisations non gouvernementales de la Région Haute Matsiatra* (2018) (The role and place of Civil Society in the implementation of environmental policy: the case of association and NGOs in the Haute Matsiatra region) he concluded that CSOs’ involvement had a positive impact on the regional environmental policy for reforestation and natural resources management transfer. Further, Andriamalala identified in the discontinuity and lack of funding the main challenge affecting CSOs’ impact in the region (cf. Chaplowe and Engo-Tjéga 2007). Similarly, this is one of the main challenges faced by CSOs dealing with land rights, as it will be discussed later in this thesis.

Against the backdrop of the literature presented above, this thesis aimed to spark a conversation on, and inspire further research into the tools the local CSOs already provide or could provide towards improved rural communities’ participation and local autonomy. In addition, this research incorporated Indigenous and participatory community-based methodologies in order to contribute to a more general project of decolonisation and indigenisation of research and environmental justice for marginalised communities. I will now introduce some context which will set the scene for the cases study.

3 Context

3.1 Civil Society Organisations

The analysis in this thesis will deal with: one local indigenous, community-based organisation (*VOIALA*); one Malagasy NGO working at the grassroots level, also member of a larger global alliance of civil society network (*FIANTSO*); and one project of the episcopal commission *Justice et Paix* Madagascar (*Lamina*). A discussion on the work of international and foreign NGOs in the region was beyond the scope of this research project. Looking at international and foreign CSOs would have called for a whole different set of questions and considerations. This thesis focused specifically on illuminating the role of *local* organisations which have unique knowledge and understanding of their *local* context.

An 1999 article on the *Economist* claimed that CSOs allegedly had a greater contribution as aid providers than all the UN organisations combined (Chaplowe & Engo-Tjéga, 2007). In fact, civil society (CS) can play quite a decisive role in the public arena from its vantage point as a political or institutional sphere between the state and the market (Burawoy 2003, 198; Chaplowe and Engo-Tjéga 2007; Lane 2003). CS tend to resist absolute definitions. Nonetheless, that of CSOs has been described as an "arena in which citizens collectively exercise civic values to promote community well-being" (Chaplowe & Engo-Tjéga, 2007).
Despite acknowledging that civil society is a western construct, and that it cannot fully describe the complexity of the African contexts (Chaplowe & Engo-Tjéga, 2007), I still find it a useful category to describe the sphere in which different typologies of groups engage in service-providing, resistance, activism and advocacy. This thesis focuses specifically on local civil society organisations within the context of the Haute Matsiatra region of Madagascar.

Michael Burawoy offers an understanding of CS that stems from a synthesis of Karl Polanyi's concept of 'active society' and Antonio Gramsci's 'civil society'. In a context of 'advanced capitalism' (Gramsci) and of 'expansion of the market' (Polanyi) the role of civil society is that of checking on state power and guarantee democratic and responsive processes in governance (Lane 2003; Burawoy 2003). Where civil society agents facilitate "the development of civic and political skills" organisations can also be regarded as "large free schools for democracy" (Gyimah-Boadi, 1996). However, civil society cannot be intended as either

monolithic or immune to conflict and power dynamics. Rather, civil society is understood in this thesis as embedded in, and reproducing diverse social practice, and thus as having the potential to secure and foster democracy as much as to cause inequality. In fact, Gramsci warned that "[in] being harnessed to the state, civil society becomes a vehicle of domination as well as a terrain of contestation" (Michael Burawoy 2003: 248). Furthermore, as Hall et al. have observed in the context of LLADs, a thin line distinguish state and CS actors at different times and in different places (2015).

3.2 Community.

Of all the definitions I could have drawn from a vast literature on the topic, I found the best-fitting one for the purpose of my discussion in the words of the poet and environmentalist Wendell Berry. Berry defined community as a social space made up of neighbours "who cherish and protect what they have in common" (2001). Above all, the communities I interviewed during my fieldwork in Madagascar strived to protect what Berry has referred to as a community's own 'production capacities', which are the at the very base of the principle of community subsistence. The reasoning behind my choice is to be found in the emphasis I want to put on the subsistence-threatening aspect of LLADs. Within the Malagasy context the *fokon'olona* are the institution "that best matches with the concept of community … they can split or, to the contrary, fuse or absorb people from different lineages or clan" but their main feature remain a sense of belonging to a shared territory (Pollini e Lassoie 2011: 817).

3.3 Land Tenure Systems and Policies in Madagascar

> *"However simple and uniform the new tenure system was to an administrator, it flung villagers willy-nilly into a world of title deeds, land offices, fees, assessments, and applications. They faced powerful new specialists in the form of land clerks, surveyors, judges, and lawyers whose rules of procedure and decisions were unfamiliar. Where the new tenure system was a colonial imposition —that is, where it was totally unfamiliar, where it was imposed by alien conquerors using an unintelligible language and institutional context, and where local practices bore no resemblance to freehold tenure— the consequences were far-reaching."*
>
> (Scott 1998: 48)

Since 1896, at the time of French rule on the island, land tenure in Madagascar was regulated based on the Torrens system. This system of land titling was created in New Zealand and Australia in the 1860s. It entailed a subdivision of indigenous land into a geometric grid of allotments which would be registered to settlers based on a first-come, first-served policy (Scott 1998; Widman 2014). In the aftermath of the independence in 1960, the Torrens system was still enforced, with only a small number of colonial titles being cancelled (Widman 2014). And yet, land ownership based on local custom had survived to this day, along with the positive law regulations of the colonial state first and the Malagasy republic thereafter. Further, until relatively recently the legal procedures to obtain land titles were complicated, lengthy and too costly for most smallholder farmers (Widman 2014; Teyssier 2010).

Since the 1990s, in an attempt to improve land tenure security and to decentralise governance and reform land tenure regulations in the country, the Malagasy government engaged in three major policy reforms. The first turning point was the issuing of the GELOSE legislation which regulated the transfer of natural resources management to local communities. *Fokon'olona* – which could translate as community in Malagasy – that wished to register as the newly created institution COBA[12], would be transferred the management of one or several resources in a given territory (Pollini & Lassoie, 2011). The COBA was conceived as an association of users who effectively would decide who will be in and out, and elaborate the rules which will regulate management (Pollini & Lassoie, 2011). The GELOSE legislation presents several issues. Firstly, as Pollini and Lassoie have pointed out, it appears ambiguous whether the management of the territory itself is a possibility, with the exception of the case of forests where the whole ecosystem is transferred as a single unit (2011). Secondly, as observed by Ferguson et al. the transfer of management (TDG, *Transfer De Gestion*) was not automatically 'community-based' as private operators like hotels could potentially apply too (2014). Further, COBAs were expected to act and function as NGOs. This expectation appears to be completely oblivious of the existence of local insitutions and systems of governance which have been in place and evolving for centuries. Furthermore it is extemely problematic as it presupposes a skillset that is not common among local rural communties where literacy and education rates are low. Effectively, educated elites within communities are given the opportunity to take control of the COBA, leaving the less educated members at a disadvantage (Pollini and Lassoies 2011; Ferguson et al. 2014). According to Pollini and Lassoie the TDG had little to do with a will to

[12] Acronym for *Communauté de Base* (Basic Community)

empower the *fokon'olona* and more with the enforcement of the global environmental and conservationist agenda (2011). In addition, they argued that TDG favours the three forms of "participatory tyranny" identified by Cooke and Khotari. Namely, the "tyranny of decision making" in the overriding by the COBA of the local customary management; the "tyranny of the method", represented by the exclusion of those who cannot manage the necessary administrative tasks; and lastly the "tyranny of the group", incarnated in the local elites taking advantage of and control over the COBA (Pollini and Lassoies 2011; Ferguson et al. 2014).

Another important national policy created in 1999 was the of the *Mise en Compatibilité des Investissements avec l'Environnement* (MECIE), or the decree of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Ferguson, et al., 2014). As ruled by the MECIE investors are legally required to assess the social and environmental risks of the project they wish to undertake. Importantly, the policy introduced a duty to engage in consultation with the local population following the presentation of the business plan (Evers et al. 2011; Ferguson et al. 2014; Gingembre 2015). Nonetheless, this duty is often overlooked by the investors, with local state institutions turning a blind eye (Gingembre 2015). This appear to have been the case in the village of Ankaramena, as it will be later discussed.

The last major shift in land tenure policy in Madagascar occurred in 2005. Then, a new land reform ruled the creation of a parallel system for land claims with the establishment of municipal land offices which would issue land certificates for a thirtieth of the price of state land titles, and in a considerably shorter time. Such reform effectively removed the presumption of land ownership and ruled that "personal or collective tenure attesting to occupation is enough for users to be recognised as owners"(Teyssier 2010). This move was meant to relieve the state apparatus from a paralysing load of land claims. Interestingly, a similar but unofficial solution had already been spreading across the country in the form of individual initiatives of persuasion directed towards local offices to get their self-made certificates authenticated, the *petits papiers* (Teyssier 2010). The key distinction is while the title is a claimed and generated right, the land certificate confirms existing rights. In fact, usually titles are requested on the state level so that lands can be sold to a new owner. This attempt to decentralise governance is a major shift from the colonial roots of Malagasy land policy, and it has been bringing about compelling improvements in public services securing land rights. Yet, its implementation has encountered significant hindrances such as the applicant's limited economic resource to produce the necessary documentation; the land offices' insufficient tools to meet the demand; and an

apparent reticence of the state to decentralise governance. A final challenge posed to the recognition of locals' ownership and governance is to be found in LLADs, and the often conflicting interests in land use of state institutions and land corporations, and the local communities.

The *fokon'olona*, state institutions and corporate bodies are all actors operating within different cultural contexts. Further, as Hall at al. have observed "states are not coherent, unified entities that consistently act with premeditation, competence or consensus. They contain multiple actors, factions and interests, many of which are in direct competition for political influence" (Hall, et al. 2015: 475). The multiple realities within a state are constructed specific ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies. More often than not the founding values and notions underlying these different paradigms can be in conflict with one another. Yet simultaneously, they could overlap, in the same way that these multiple realities intersect. The differing understanding and meaning attributed to land by the different actors of LLADs is an example of this. On the one hand, recurring in my conversations with the members of the communities I interviewed were terms like 'ancestral', 'given by the ancestors', 'sacred'. To local communities, territory is often 'made' through everyday use, memorialization of past generations of use and the collectivization of histories and practices on the land" (Wolford, et al. 2013: 199). On the other hand, to the state, land is property which can be leased, sold, and transferred. For the corporations interested in purchasing community territories land is regarded mainly as capital. And yet, land is not just territories "carved out by state rule" but also "those performed by indigenous or subaltern communities that may not have formal or official access to the land" (Wolford, et al. 2013: 199). To communities land tends to be more than just a commodity, it represents "life, stability, livelihood and social reproduction" (Wolford et al. 2013: 202).

Traditionally, use and access to land resources in Haute Matsiastra were based on oral agreements and familial lineages. Ferguson et al. have described ancestral lands as the most significant category of land ownership in rural Madagascar, where land is mostly owned by communities and individual families (2013: 69). As Widman has observed "[p]asturelands are in general communal and are used by several households" (2014: 134). No written certificates or land titles of sort were traditionally involved. Nonetheless, to the state-actor titles and certificates appear to be the only reliable evidence to determine property rights. Lastly, I would argue that CSOs lay somewhere in between. Evers et al. make a helpful analytical distinction between *lex fori* – positive state law – and *lex loci* – local customary law. Nonetheless, they

stress how people draw “discursively and practically from varied social and legal frameworks” (Evers, 2013). Being able to move between the two levels of *lex fori* and *lex loci* is another crucial necessity for indigenous and local communities wishing to get their claims across. In fact, as Evers et al. have observed

> *“[with the arrival of the international stakeholders holding nationally approved (lex fori) leases, the tompon-tany [land masters] theoretically can lose their land for a considerable period of time – or possibly forever – as they cannot just reclaim their land whenever they wish. … Local populations must then change legal forum in order to fight for their rights. They will have to deal with a lex fori environment … [however] [lack of knowledge, money and relevant networks to engage in positive-law legal procedures discourage many local stakeholders from bringing their claims to court”*
>
> (Evers et al. 2011: 128)

3.4 Resistance and Food Sovereignty

Community gardening and environmental education, along with the establishment of local community-based organisations all belong to the framework of food sovereignty. Here sovereignty has to be understood as “the ability of people in a given community to control their own fate whether through localised resource or the capacity to access state resources that buffers persons from risk” (Wolford, et al. 2013: 201). The Declaration of Nyeleni was supported by the international peasants’ movement *La Via Campesina,* and it was crafted by local and Indigenous communities from all over the world. It defined food sovereignty as follows:

> *“the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. ... It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal – fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food*

> *and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. …”*[13].

Food security advocates universal access to safe and healthy food. However, it is “agnostic about the production regime, about the social and economic conditions under which food ends up on the table”(Patel in Isakson 2009: 730). The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) has condemned the way the concept of food security has been often mis-used as justification of policies which prioritise yield and delivery over quality and sustainability. In fact, AFSA went as far as to suggest that food security is the “direct opposite of food sovereignty”[14]. Conversely, food sovereignty is part of the counter-narrative to land enclosures, and to the commodification and homogenization of sources, means and ways of production of food (Hall et al. 2015). However, food sovereignty is not synonym with protectionism. Nor it deems subsistence agriculture and market economy as mutually exclusive. Rather, as Isakson has suggested, both market and non-market forms of provisioning may be retained and considered important by communities, who would see them as distinct and generating different values (Isakson, 2009).

This thesis contends that CSOs could play a determining role in enabling the creation of network and the means which could lead to communities’ empowerment in a radical project aiming to counter-enclosure, food sovereignty and self-determination. CSOs involvement and participation in creating local social networks would enable an ‘articulated autonomy’ of “communities producing a diversity of goods, activities, services [and] uses” (Wolford et al. 2013: 202). Such ‘articulated autonomy’ would imply stronger locals’ participation and self-determination. This is in stark contrast with what happens in LLADs, where instead “ control [is] ceded to ‘outsiders’ in multi-thousand hectare increments and ninety-year contracts [and] state actors struggle to maintain and adapt positions of sovereignty” (Wolford et al. 2013: 202).

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[13] https://viacampesina.org/en/declaration-of-nyi/ [Accessed 07/05/18]
[14] http://afsafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/AFSA-Document.pdf [Accessed 14/05/18]

4 Methodology

"In rejecting a quasi-positivistic stance that claims to attain an understanding that is in some ways superior or detached from those of my informants, the issue arises of whether the actors entering my ethnography are simply protagonists of a script I am merely recording , or whether they are themselves scriptwriters like me? And if I hold to the latter view, as I do, then what is the difference in the scripts? My answer to this is that I draw upon their scripts for a narrative I am writing for a different audience, in a different language and genre. And to that end I have to enrol them in my ethnographic project, while letting them simultaneously enrol me in theirs.
In fact, underpinning the rest of my account lies the idea that the whole process of enrolment constitutes an ongoing process that continues throughout the stages of analysis and writing up"

(de Vries in Long & Long 1992: 65)

De Vries addresses the issue of representation and recording of reality in ethnographic research and advocates for a mutual process of 'enrolment'. Enrolment is employed by de Vries as it was defined by Latour. That is as "a set of practices of representation in which the researcher engages in order to accomplish his or her ethnographic project" (de Vries in Long & Long 1992: 84). The necessary rejection of the positivist claim to a detached and higher level understanding of reality than that of the people living in that reality leaves the researcher with blurred boundaries between the role of the researcher and the researched. In whose telling should the narratives that make up a piece of research be? What is the role of the researcher? What is the role of the participants? Are there any overlaps of these two distinct roles? Should there be?

In this section I am going to deal with these questions as I discuss the methodological choices that shaped this thesis. I am going to start by presenting the guiding principles in my research and explaining my methodological approach. Then I am going to present my research questions, and how I sought to answer them.
Finally, I am going to move onto the research ethics I evaluated my research upon and end with some comments on the challenges and limitations I encountered.

4.1 Participatory Research

Underlying my fieldwork was the ambition to create a space to get communities' voices heard. This process would involve collecting stories which do not always make it up to where policies are made and decided upon. In order to achieve that it made sense to adopt ethnographical

methods based on participatory research or community-based research. The ethnographical methods included: participant observation and semi-structured individual and group interviews. Focus groups were conducted with *VOIALA* to decide on the focus and the design of the research. Group interviews were conducted in the villages of Andonaka, Ankaramena and Ivoamba to get an idea of the plurality of voices behind the communities' claims and how these were in conversation.

Despite acknowledging the different canons of participatory research and community-based research, for the purpose of this study I focused on the main tenets that these two research models share.
Boyd identified community-based research as

> *"research [that] challenges the traditional research paradigm by recognising that complex social problems today must involve multiple stakeholders in the research process - not as subjects but as co-investigators and co-authors. It is an orientation to inquiry rather than a methodology. ... [I]t is relational research where all partners change and grow ... as they work together and strategise to solve issues and problems that are defined by and meaningful to them. "*

(in Leavy 2014: 499).

In the initial phase of my research project I set out to scrutinise indigenous capacity as a contributor to sustainability and resilience of social-ecological systems in face of profound social and environmental changes. Here 'capacity' is intended as indigenous people's ability to generate rules, norms and institutions which dictate their use of ecosystems, and through which they have sustained resource use over time (Tengö & Von Heland, 2011). Specifically, I wanted to look at community-based projects in tropical forests because I was interested in the intersection between environmental issues and Indigenous peoples' issues related to access to and management of natural resources on their territories.

The first challenge was to find a community-based project who would be willing to welcome me to conduct my research. I was aware of how Indigenous groups around the world have often seen their knowledge and biological resources being stolen, depleted and commodified by others who would not then share the profits derived from such knowledge (Berkes 1999). Hence, as a non-Indigenous researcher with no particular connection with any of the projects I

was considering, I was aware that my interest could be perceived as unsolicited and potentially exploitative. In light of this, in my initial contacts with a few selected projects across various tropical areas I included a self-reflection on my motivation and on the principles which would guide my research. Particularly, I would emphasise the participatory element of the approach I was going to employ.

Generally, my proposition was well received. However, it was from *VOIALA* Madagascar that I received the strongest interest. Sahondra Raheliarisolo – the president of the organisation – was my first contact. In hindsight, the interest and willingness to help that I perceived on Sahondra's side was determining in picking the organisation she heads. Furthermore, an initial understanding of one another's standpoints came from our shared interest and connection with the Slow Food network. In fact, it was through one of the Facebook groups of Slow Food Italia we were both part of that I learnt about *VOIALA* and their projects. Being part of the same network was reassuring for Sahondra, as it was likely to point to my awareness of and adherence to Slow Food' s principles. This provided an initial common ground for a conversation on what I could investigate, as well as on which principles my the research would be guided by. After having established a connection with Sahondra I was invited to join *VOIALA* for the months of June, July and August of 2017.

4.2 In the Field: The Self-Reflective Cycle of Participatory Action Research

My research design was inspired by what Kemmis and McTaggart have describe as the self-reflective cycles of participatory action research (in Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 563). These involve a continuous engagement of the community in defining the questions, designing and planning the data collection. This is followed by the implementation of actions involving the community members at all its stages. Self-reflection on the process is practiced together with the participants. The latter usually leads to a re-planning which signals the recommencement of the same cycle. Underlying this participatory research cycle are six fundamental principles individuated by Winter (in Chilisa 2012). While presenting these six principles I am going to show how I incorporated them in the research. Chilisa (2012) has discussed Winter's principle as follows:

Reflexive critique: emphasising self-critical thinking in addressing possible biases; tendency of exclusion of indigenous perspectives and the role of the researcher.

Dialectic critique: it is paramount to critically address differences in the understating of reality and the processes behind this understanding as they arise in the encounter between the researcher and the participants.

In the context of my research these two principles were incorporated by including in the analysis how some aspects of the local culture are reflected in the testimonies. This was done also by valuing how locals made sense through their cultural lenses of the issues I investigated. In doing so I relied on the support of the participants, as *locals*, in explaining local customs and beliefs. Nevertheless, I am aware that my position as an outsider, my limited knowledge of the people, and time limitations did not allow for any in-depth incorporation of local world-views and values in my analysis.

Collaboration: this principle calls for the involvement of the participants in determining the design and the objectives of the research. It also implies that everyone's contribution is worthwhile.

Risking disturbance: here emphasis is on the importance of being open to adjust, adapt and accept change as a result of the research process.

I set it as priority to take all the time necessary to try to find out what the participants' understanding of my research was. As well as how this could be adjusted in ways that would meet their needs where possible. I decided not to settle on a specific approach until reaching the field, with the idea of using these principles as guidelines and adapting them to the context of my research along the way. Hence, I resolved to make a final decision on what I should focus on in my research and how I was to conduct it only after convening with the participants. I made sure my interests and my intentions were clear to everyone involved. I was always willing to make adjustments if these would produce research more relevant and useful to *VOIALA*. It was important to me to make sure my endeavours would produce information relevant and meaningful to *VOIALA*'s objectives. This meant staying open to changes in the focus of my project, as it then happened.

Upon my arrival during a discussion with the members of the organisation there emerged among the participants a strong preoccupation about what they referred to as land grabbing cases in the region. As I was also interested in the issue, following my conversation with *VOIALA* it was decided with them that I should look into some of the cases of large scale acquisition that had been happening in the region. If on the one hand this issue did not seem to directly impact any of the community members of *VOIALA*, on the other hand the organisation had a strong interest in understanding how other communities were affected and what could be done to support them. *VOIALA* was very keen in taking part in a public debate on and understanding of large scale land acquisition in Madagascar. In addition, they wanted to know more about the kind of support communities experiencing the phenomenon may need.

<u>Creating plural structures</u>: multiple voices should be acknowledged by the researcher and participating communities.

<u>Internalising</u>: researchers should be able to connect theory and practice and hence synthesise new understandings and actions.

Together with *VOIALA* we settled on a plan of action: we would visit three main sites of conflict which had been reported in the news in the previous year. These three sites were the three municipalities of Andonaka, Ankaramena and Ivoamba in the district of Ambalavao and Lalangina, respectively. The three sites were picked based on the tensions that had arisen between state institutions and local communities regarding the implementation of an agribusiness project supported by the region Haute Matsiastra and funded by a foreign company. The tensions brought by the project pointed to the presence of a multiplicity of actors with conflicting interests and/or understandings of the project. With *VOIALA* we decided to interview members of the communities, civil organisations that had supported the latter in their claims and two state representatives, one supporting and one against the communities' claims. This variety of interviewees aimed at producing a multiplicity of voices, hence creating plural structures of understanding.

Finally, the principle of Internalising was met by analysing the narratives emerged during fieldwork first with *VOIALA*, and then against the background of relevant literature. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the final aim was to produce a set of information that would

be useful to *VOIALA* and potentially other local organisations in determining ways to support communities facing land acquisition deals.

4.3 Methods and Participants

Focus groups, participant observation and semi-structured individual and group interviews were the methods employed to gather the data.
The research design was initially based on a first interview with Sahondra via email and multiple focus groups with the members of *VOIALA* upon my arrival. At the outset, I also discussed with *VOIALA* which methods I would employ. We agreed that individual and group interviews would be appropriate if I was to hear the voices of the multiple actors involved in the cases of land acquisitions in Andonaka, Ankaramena and Ivoamba. These would be conducted in Malagasy or French. I had working proficiency of French but I could not speak Malagasy. Nonetheless Sahondra, the president of the organisation, offered to be my translator as she was interested in being present during the interviews as a facilitator as well. With her we would mostly speak in Italian as she could speak the language fluently due to the organisation's close links with Italian donors. Hence, Italian would be the language interviews in Malagasy would be translated in. The interviews with the state representatives
and with the representatives of CSOs were conducted by myself in French.

Simultaneously, I engaged in participant observation within *VOIALA* by shadowing the president and some of the members in their activities, and helping out in a capacity resembling that of an intern. Effectively, to *VOIALA*'s eyes and to the communities we visited I temporarily became a member of the organisation. This enabled me to find out about the organisation's activities, their methods and their relationship with the communities from the vantage point of a semi-insider.

If on the one hand my research was participatory because it was conducted with *VOIALA*, on the other the communities we interviewed were mere informants and did not engage in the design and analysis of this research. This was the case due to time restrictions, which did not allow me to have multiple visits to the villages to build the relationships needed for a closer collaboration and greater participation. In fact, *VOIALA* itself had no connection nor previous knowledge of the communities we decided to interview. Yet, the reason behind choosing those

communities lays in the fact that none of the groups that make up and work with *VOIALA* had experienced encroachment on their lands. In order to find out how LLADs were affecting communities in the region and gaining insight into what sort of support these needed we had to turn to communities that were unknown to us.

Upon our visits to the three villages we would start our interviews explaining how we had heard about the cases and why we were interested in looking into the issue. We would let the interviewees speak freely at first, to give more of a conversation feel to the interview, and to see what elements emerged as dominant in their narratives. Only as we progressed further in the conversation we would ask more specific questions to complete the initial picture given by the villagers.

We would ask questions to understand the locals' understanding of: how the deals had been initiated; what they would entail; how the population reacted and why; how the events had unfolded; the occurrence and perception of consultation processes on the projects; the perception of available mechanisms for participation in the decision making; the different points of view within the communities; whether they had received external support to their claims; how they established connections with the external supporters; what the local wishes and expectations for development were.

The participants were chosen in various ways. For instance, based on interviews heard on the radio, as in the case of a nun's congregation in Andonaka. The radio is an ever-present medium in Malagasy homes and offices. The members of *VOIALA* would regularly listen to the radio as well. Due to the remoteness of certain areas and poor road infrastructure the radio is one of the main ways people keep up to date with what happens in the region. The programmes were in Malagasy, hence I had to completely rely on *VOIALA*'s members to gather information through this medium. At first we interviewed some of the members of the communities of Andonaka, Ankaramena and Ivoamba. In total we interviewed 14 people in three villages, out of which 8 were women. Often we would be directed and introduced by on interviewee to another (snowballing). In a second phase I decided to include also politicians and civil society organisations, namely *Justice et Paix and FIANTSO*, as these emerged as fundamental actors along with the members of the communities. We later learnt that the radio we received most of the information on the LLADs case in the region from was in fact connected to the same umbrella organisation of *Justice et Paix*. In fact, the use of media outlets to spread information

about the LLADs cases later emerged as one of the most important ways in which civil society organisations can provide support and create resistance among communities facing deals.

Including a plurality of outlooks on the issue would allow to analyse large land acquisitions as a multifaceted phenomenon involving a multiplicity of agendas. Thus, the final dataset was the result of hearing a diverse choir of clashing and bridging voices coming from communities, local organisations and state institutions.

4.4 The importance of building relationships

During fieldwork I shadowed the president of *VOIALA* in all her activities, as she followed me in all the interviews and focus groups. Furthermore, I was hosted by her and her family. Sharing meals, commuting times and daily schedules offered us the chance to build a relationship of trust and reciprocity. Sahondra would help me out in understanding aspects of Malagasy culture and society which I was not familiar with. I would offer to practice Italian and English with her, as well as to complete translation-related tasks for *VOIALA* from English or Italian when needed.

Sahondra, Tovo and Heritiana were the main people from *VOIALA* I would relate to. Sahondra being the president, Heritiana the former president and Tovo the main 'operative', running from one site to another to check on *VOIALA*'s projects and convening with other members 'on the field' of the member villages. Heritiana was in the process of concluding his PhD at the University of Fianarantsoa, whereas Sahondra was about to begin her PhD at the same university. Tovo had been an student-intern from the same institution in the past, before becoming an employee. Both Sahondra and Tovo were members themselves of two of the member communities of *VOIALA* with ongoing projects of community gardening and reforestation.

Whilst visiting Ankaramena, Ivoamba and Andonaka it would be always at least three of us, occasionally the four of us. Becoming an 'unofficial' member of *VOIALA* for the duration of fieldwork was pivotal to the research. I believe it was being seen with *VOIALA* and being able to say that I was conducting the research *with* them that really made this study what it turned out to be. Were I on the field by myself it would not have been possible to gain the necessary

knowledge, trust and willingness to participate that was needed for the interviews that we conducted.

Furthermore, the quality of the relationship I built with the members of *VOIALA*, and in particular with Sahondra and their family reinforced my motivation in conducting the research project, as well as the sense of accountability I felt towards them and the communities we interviewed.

4.5 Engaged Research

Because of the past abuse and misrepresentation that indigenous peoples around the world have endured, there is a strong belief within the discipline that research produced on indigenous communities should hold relevance to those same communities and contribute to their wellbeing. There is general agreement in scholarship that indigenous research should take part in the wider agenda of social transformation aiming to action upon conditions of poverty and inequality, an improvement of living conditions (Shanley & Evjen eds. 2015; Smith 2012; Hale 2006; Chilisa 2012). Some researchers have even gone as far as arguing that research should be driven by a moral obligation to contribute to processes of justice (Drügge eds. 2016). In choosing to embark on a research endeavour on indigenous issues one should expect to be held accountable for the consequence that the research may have. Ideally, when people are the focus of a study the researcher should always be aware of the possible outcomes and consequences of her or his research for the researched. In light of the latter one should then make informed decisions on the way people are going to be represented and how the research is going to be used. Ethically sound and informed decisions are particularly essential in dealing with minorities and people at risk of discrimination.

Since the rise of critical theories in the 1950s and 1960s there has been a growing body of literature, and broadening of the debate on the importance of a reflective attitude towards one's own subject or field of studies and ideological standpoint. Being aware of and making clear the ideological and cultural position one observes from should be crucial in any research endeavour. One should be expected to reflect upon how their own background and history could affect the research, rather than holding onto the pretention that *real* objectivity and detachment can be achieved. The researcher's analysis and reflection cannot happen in a vacuum. Research is not performed by empty vessels. Every researchers has a history and a background, and these

are unavoidably going to inform the researcher's interpretations of the data collected. For instance, choices on how to represent the people and the issues being researched tend to reveal a great deal of the ideals that the researcher is committed to (Drügge eds. , 2016). Nonetheless, for reasons of transparency and so to avoid compromising the credibility of the research, common sense would suggest that one should always clearly state her/his standpoint, while maintaining critical distance (Johnson, 2014). Yet, in so doing one is not necessarily prevented from taking a stand. In fact, scholars of Indigenous Studies such as Torjer A. Olsen and Rebecca Lawrence alongside Kaisa Raitio do not believe in the possibility of remaining disengaged, and have decided to continue to be "implicated" (Drügge, 2016: 42; 132).

Similarly, on the negotiations of political activism in research, researchers J. Marina Apgar, Tero Mustonen, Simone Lovera and Miguel Lovera have recently suggested in the Bulletin of the Institute of Development Studies that while researchers should not necessarily become political activists, when engaging in challenging real-life issues "with communities whose livelihoods are threatened, being blind to politics and power is not sufficient and is unethical" and that they should take the "opportunity to facilitate the questioning of underlying assumptions on how research is constructed" (2017:5).

4.6 Ethics

As a foreigner and someone external to the communities I visited I had to be constantly aware that I could be perceived as an intruder or as 'someone sent by someone else'. During a group interview in the municipality of Ivoamba I was initially met with suspicion and asked if I had been sent by one of the political parties. I then explained further to the participants why I was there and who I was. Eventually they said themselves delighted to see that someone was interested in their opinion. They said they were happy that we decided to visit the area and try find out for ourselves what actually happened rather than just drawing our conclusion after listening to the news on the radio. As I looked at contentious issues which included civil disobedience and general tensions between some of the actors involved, I had to be mindful in limiting the impact that my presence could have. For this reason I was careful not to name anyone in conversation with the other informants, unless she or he had given their consent to be named.

I tried my best to be realistic as to my possibilities and the impact of my research project. I did not wish to make promises which would be difficult to keep.

I would always ask the interviewees whether they wanted their interviews to be anonymised. The majority wished to stay anonymous. In one case I decided not to name the interviewee even if they were a democratically elected representative and they expressed their consent to be named. The reason was that the content of that interview really was in conflict with what stated by the President of the Region Haute Matsiastra and I did not wish to foment further tensions as the two figures were already on opposing sides.

Lastly, reciprocity added to my research. My presence created the opportunity for *VOIALA* to gather useful information in the region which they would not have accessed otherwise. In fact, thanks to the strategy fund I received from SESAM to carry out research on Indigenous issues I was able to cover all the costs of our visits to the three villages, which would not have been possible for the organisation due to their limited resources. More importantly, the data I gathered with *VOIALA* was shared with all the members of the organisation for different purposes. Heritiana, for instance presented our findings during a lecture at a local college. Sahondra, the president of the organisation, used the data to plan and get started with her PhD, also at the University of Fianarantsoa. I hope to continue this collaboration by co-authoring a paper with Sahondra in the near future.

4.7 Challenges and Limitations

Being foreigner and unfamiliar to Madagascar and Malagasy culture obviously limited this study . Yet, with the help of *VOIALA* members and of encounters both with Malagasy and foreigners familiar with the national and local culture I was able to navigate what was a complex and variegated new context to me. To some extent, locals' input and some background research made up for my unfamiliarity and unrelatedness in the analysis of the narratives I was exposed to during fieldwork.

Not speaking the language was another important challenge as I had to rely on having other people translating for me - usually simultaneously and often in not the quietest environments - and that meant for some information to be lost in translation.

The principles of reciprocity and accountability were challenging to fulfil due to linguistic , geographical and technological barriers. Due to the isolation and remoteness of the villages where the interviews were conducted, as well as to the limited access to appropriate means of

communication I was not able for the time being to go back and share with the interviewees the final version of my thesis. Moreover the language barrier makes it impossible for the majority of the participants to read the thesis. However I am planning on translating it at least into French and to send copies to the interested parties where possible. *VOIALA* will of course receive a copy.

Poverty and deprivation are part of the picture in most areas of Madagascar. They definitely were in the villages I visited, to varying degrees. Being confronted with the realities brought about by such issues was not always easy and often made me question my very presence as a privileged white European researcher on the field. I would be very conscious of the feelings and the associations that my presence would triggered in the people around me. I would often feel uncomfortable and out of place. Even worse, I would feel like an intruder into a difficult reality where I did not belong. Simultaneously, being exposed to some of the day-to-day problems faced by communities who experience poverty and deprivation reinforced my understanding of the context and my perception of the sense of urgency for change felt in many areas of Haute Matsiatra and of Madagascar in general.

Lastly, staying open to change all along during fieldwork and depending on *VOIALA*'s input in determining the research meant changing almost completely my initial research focus, with all the distress and the insecurities that come with a 'last minute' major change. However, I could overcome that relatively easily as I was motivated by the will to produce a study that would be relevant for the community who had so readily welcomed me.

5 Three cases from Haute Matsiatra

According to David Walsh analysis is a constant and ongoing process occurring in the "ideas and hunches of the researcher as he or she engages in the field setting and seeks to understand the data being collected." (in Seale 2012). Similarly, I tried to actively engage with the field by being both responsive to and critical of the inputs I would get from the people I met and the media I was exposed to. Since the beginning of my fieldwork I tried to analyse the context of Haute Matsiatra by constantly moving between the local and the global level. I looked for the presence of patterns which would link the cases of Andonaka, Ankaramena and Ivoamba to the bigger picture of the global land rush, especially in the African context. Hence, the analysis was carried out against the background of the existing literature on the phenomena both on the national and the global level.

What follows is an account of the interviews I conducted during single visits to the three villages. Andonaka and Ankaramena are grouped together in the discussion given their geographical proximity and the similarity of the proposed projects in the two areas. More importantly, the concerns of the villagers in Andonaka were particularly conversant with the experience in Ankaramena in the aftermath of the project implementation. The interviews presented here intended to shed light on some of the issues which LLADs can bring about in local realities. In light of these issues information was gathered from the interviewees in terms of the support they received and that which they lacked in facing LLADs. Based on the analysis of such information , CSOs' role in supporting community claims and facilitating multi-stakeholders interaction is then discussed. The theoretical framework I operated within considered communities, CSOs, the state local institutions and corporative entities as the main actors involved. It was assumed that these different stakeholders could have conflicting interests, as well as differing values, outlooks and knowledge systems.

The following cases of LLADs are going to be presented through the stories I collected with *VOIALA*. Together we interviewed both people who opposed the project and who supported it. These interviews gave insight into some of the main issues affecting communities facing LLADs. They reflected the narratives supporting such deals globally, as introduced earlier in this thesis. They also pointed to some of the main challenges Madagascar is currently facing when it comes to land tenure rights policy implementation. Lastly, and more crucially, they shed light on the role of CSOs in supporting communities' claims. A major role was played by

the CSOs *FIANTSO* and *Justice et Paix* with their *Lamina* project. Its contribution is going to be discussed after having presented the cases of Andonaka, Ankaramena and Ivoamba.

Map 1. Based on: ©OpenStreetMap contributors, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 license (CC BY-SA)

5.1 Andonaka and Ankaramena.

Andonaka and Ankaramena can be found on the High Plateaus - the Hautes Terres near the city of Ambalavao – along the sides of the N7, the National Highway which cuts across the country from the capital Antananarivo in the North to the major centre of Tulear in the South. The area is characterised by expanses of red earth dotted with mango and papaya trees. Pastures for the

zebus and fields of manioca surround clusters of houses against the background of rounded mountains, not far from the Andringitra National Park.

Fig. 1 The area around the village of Andonaka (Photo by the Author)

The resistance.

It was with some difficulties, due to rugged terrain and lack of signposting once we left the N7, that we reached a congregation of nuns in Andonaka: the *Congrégation Soeurs du Christ*. The religious community ran the local school for about 1060 schoolchildren and tended to the surrounding fields. As we introduced ourselves we explained how we learnt on the radio about the congregation's involvement in the protests against a local development project supported by the Region. The congregation's support to the community so far had involved: contacting regional media and giving interviews, along with planning and organising public demonstrations with the support of the civil society organisations *Justice et Paix* and their *Lamina* project. Two nuns welcomed us in and expressed their willingness to share with us their viewpoint on the case. Yet, they requested not to be named individually. The nuns were our very first interviewees. One of the nuns explained that the project they opposed entailed the construction of a zebu ranch for 1400 heads of cattle over a surface of 24 hectares. The initial phase of the project would begin on uncultivated areas, to then move onto currently cultivated

fields, some of which tended to by the nuns. The ranch was meant to become part of the Mada Ranch farming project supported by the regional government of Haute Matsiatra and funded by Chinese investors.

Reportedly, since the previous February both the *lonaky* (authority from lineage descent - pre-colonial) and mayor (local state institution) welcomed the project and were willing to sell their land and that of their relatives. According to the nuns, they gathered the community and expected them to sign for the concession of their lands without fully explaining the conditions nor developing on the implications of such decision for their futures and those of their families. The nuns pointed out that many villagers did not have any formal education and were unable to read the documents they were supposed to sign.

Protests and demonstrations started the month previous to our visit, in May. One episode in particular appeared pivotal in the nun's narration. During the protests the locals had used the council bell to call for public meetings in the village. Following the protests the mayor made the decision to remove the bell. This was seen by the local population as an outrage and a threat to local democracy and participation. This fact prompted the community to write to the Ministry of Interior and make an official claim in court about the event. Such events would seem to point to the frailty of the structures for local participation, and to the presence of internal conflicts within the community. Tensions and conflicting interests within the community constitute one of the main sources of land tenure-related insecurity in Madagascar (Burnod et al. 2011). These are not always triggered by external actors and influences but may arise among different social classes and spheres of interests. As Borras and Franco have pointed out, "[local communities are usually comprised of social classes and groups with different, often competing interests and varying degrees of political power" (2010: 33-34). Dismissing this complexity would hamper our understanding of local social dynamics in LLADs.

Fig. 2 The area around the village of Andonaka (Photo by the Author)

Security and Environmental concerns.

The nuns and the villagers we interviewed were concerned that the ranch would increase the number of cattle raids in the area. Security issues linked with zebu-related robberies is perceived as one of the most pressing issues in the region, as I learnt from villagers, journalists, local politicians, and members of other organisations throughout my stay. Furthermore, the community did not want the project to go through due to the impact that the presence of 1.400 zebus would have on the environment. They worried that the quality of air and water would worsen due sewage and an increasing presence of insects attracted by the animals. The river waters are already infested with malaria-carrying mosquitoes. They feared the project could worsened the quality of the water and exacerbate the situation impacting on the health of the schoolchildren attending the local school. During the conversation with the nuns a male villager was called to discuss the case with us. He preferred to remain anonymous. The man also supported the protests. He was not originally from the area but had bought land and had become a member of the community. In his job he fulfilled a role of public utility. Like the majority of the villagers, he said himself opposed to the project due to environmental concerns. He said himself especially against the idea of selling his land. He said

“What will be left to my children if we sell our land? The little sums we are offered in exchange of our lands would only last us a few years. Whereas our lands could stay with our families forever.”

During the interview it was pointed out that the bad consequences the project had already made themselves evident in Ankaramena. There, the first phase of the Mada Ranch project had already been implemented and had been running since November 2016.

Ankaramena lies at less than an hour distance from Andonaka so we travelled there after meeting the nuns in Andonaka. There, we were told that the ranch hosted around 4000 zebus, and that it had created at least 580 jobs. The interviewees in Ankaramena included the two owners – wife and husband – and two – one man and one woman – of the customers approached in one of the local *gargottes* (Malagasy tavern) and they all wished to remain anonymous. According to them the ranch brought new diseases; along with foul odour and more insects. The river was reportedly extremely polluted due to sewage. We were further told by the interviewees that often when the local water pump did not work the locals would fetch water from that same river. According to the locals in Ankaramena no legally required environmental impact assessment was carried out before the project. This was confirmed by a figure of institutional importance in the regional district of Lalangina. On a separate occasion, when questioned about it the President of the Region failed to provide any information on the assessment and responded that ‘they were in the process of assessing the project’. It is worth noticing that according to the regulations the environmental impact assessment should be carried out before the implementation of the project (according to the Decree no. 99-954 of 15 December 1999 modified by decree no. 2007- 167).

Driving to the village we had observed with VOIALA how the ranch had been built right next to the river. As we were driving past and conversing on the cases in our car we indeed wondered if the waters had been affected by the presence of the ranch.

Fig. 3 Mada-Ranch, Ankaramena (Photo by the Author)

In Ankaramena, we asked whether they would have welcomed the ranch if they had actually been included in the planning and management of the project. Some of the informants said themselves interested in a co-management of the project, they continued:

> *"Yes, this is our land, we should manage it ourselves but the politicians always keep everything for themselves".*

This statement reveals a general distrust towards the state and its representatives and a will for locally-driven and locally-embedded development. This attitude will be discussed more thoroughly in stories collected in Ivoamba, whose case is going to be presented in the next section.

The impact of the project on the local social fabric and on availability and quality of employment.

At the time of our visit there had been protests in Ankaramena as well, especially supported by some people who recently lost their jobs. We were told that at least 300 people had recently lost their jobs in the ranch due to a company restructuring. We learnt that the mayor was

originally in favour of the project. Following the protests he had become more supportive of the community's discontent with the ranch. Unfortunately we were not able to interview the mayor during our visit due to a recent loss of one of his relatives.

The job losses would point to the insecurity and lack of community engagement often found in land acquisition deals. Decision makers do not always take into account the needs of the communities. Furthermore, as White et al. have argued,

> *"[c]ontemporary forms of agrarian transition involve investments and dispossession that expel people from agriculture without absorbing their labour in manufactures or elsewhere in the economy, and create an agrarian question of labour"*
> (White et al. 2012: 624).

As Li has contended, the impacts of land deals on the local social fabric are heavily reliant on the availability and quality of employment (Li in White et al. 2012: 636). White et al. have suggested that further insight into how projects impact local social dynamics linked to income distribution and increase could provide a 'more firmly grounded analytical basis for the discussion' on land deals.

Sonja Vermeulen and Lorenzo Cotula have warned on the risks of incoming agribusiness projects (2012). They pointed to the fact that the jobs the latter tend to provide are often "largely short-term, unskilled, and insecure". That is to say, that the promises of more jobs frequently end up becoming yet another element of insecurity and uncertainty in already neglected areas. In addition, "benefits that only accrue to a few will increase local differentiation, for example between waged and unwaged, in both economic and political senses" (Vermeulen and Cotula 2012: 900).

Lack of transparency and adequate consultation.

A figure of political prominence and importance in the district had showed support to the communities' protests in Ankaramena and Andonaka. We decided to interview this person to hear his views on the issue. According to this informant, the ranch built in Ankaramena was supposed to improve local safety and prevent cattle raiding. Yet, the project did not seem to deliver on that. Quite the opposite in fact. From this interviewee we received more details on the land property. The land that was transferred to the company for the construction of the ranch

officially belonged to the state. We learnt that the zebus would be destined to exportation. This, according to the interviewee would create more insecurity in the area. Further, it was pointed out how the Chinese have been often accused by civil society and politicians of not being transparent in their deals. For instance, according to both this informant and the members of the community we interviewed, allegedly no environmental impact assessment was carried out before setting up the ranch in Ankaramena. Supposedly, the local population knew nothing about the deal before it was implemented. The interviewee argued that generally the population does not know how to deal with these issues. In fact, we were told, the communities are rarely provided with adequate information in similar cases. This is in accordance with what described in a series of studies on large scale land contracts conducted by Lorenzo Cotula (Cotula 2011) on the lack of consultation with and participation of the local communities in the deals. Mathilde Gingembre pointed out how “there is a lack of effective mechanisms for land users to either reject or shape land deals” and that “[even when local consultations take place, agrarian communities’ bargaining power is limited by a lack of access to economic and institutional alternatives” (Gingembre 2015: 562). The politician did not express himself against development or investment. Rather, it was pointed out how one of the main issues in land deals would appear to be the lack of transparency. Furthermore, these deals are often characterised by unfair prices and compensations paid to communities to take on lease or buy their lands and resources. The interviewee concluded stating the importance for the communities and civil society to campaign to raise awareness and knowledge of the regulations; as well as lobbying and getting media attention on the issues and the existent cases.

These final remarks, together with what reported by the nuns in Andonaka on the support they received, points to the importance of the role of civil society organisations in helping communities deal with land deals.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning the presence among the villagers of the suspicion of ongoing mineral exploration of the area, especially in Ankaramena mountain. This hypothesis emerged in conversations with several of the community members’ and some of the journalists I had the opportunity to talk with during my time in Madagascar . There is currently not enough evidence of that being the case. Yet if anything, this points to the widespread wariness of the villagers towards representative of the States brought about by a general lack of transparency in land acquisition deals.

It would appear that conflict will be bound to continue to occur, unless the State and the investors work together on providing more information to the population. Clear protocols for

the project’s proposition and implementation need to be elaborated and put in place. Some useful tools are already in place, such as the environmental impact assessment. However, as the case of Ankramena illustrated, it would seem still too easy to elude this duty. Hence, better mechanism to insure that laws and regulations are respected seem to be needed.

5.2 Ivoamba.

From Fianarantsoa we reached Ivoamba on a steep dirt road with potholes that would be more accurate to describe as dusty crevasses. In *VOIALA*’s car we often feared we would not make it up the steeper hills. To our relief we reached the village placed on a plateau of red-earthed fields and rice paddies.

Fig. 4 The city hall of Ivoamba (Photo by the Author)

The project and the view of a local politician.

We met up with a local politician and explained that we knew there had been protests supported by two civil society organisations. We explained that we were looking into finding out more about the project and hearing about the different opinions on its development within the community. We were told that a project proposal had been made by the Region and Mada Ranch

to 91 municipalities. The project would entail the conversion of some 174 hectares of local farmland into cereal cultivations. The aim was to supply the zebu ranch in Ankaramena with fodder for the animals.

In Ivoamba there was interest among local politicians because they saw the project as an opportunity to create development and employment. The deal proposed by the investors included building a school and a road, new infrastructures every year. It also included rebuilding a bridge which had been destroyed during a flood. Other interventions encompassed: an improved water management; setting up a local fishery; sowing the crops twice a year rather than just once. The politician complained that the municipality did not receive adequate support from the state. We were told by several informants, including someone in the administration, that the local financial resources were so meagre that some of the public officers in the municipality did not receive a salary.

There appeared to be an administrative vacuum in service-providing, the area seemed neglected by the state institutions. Hence, support needed to be found elsewhere. As pointed out by Ferguson et al. (2013: 73); Burnod et al. (2011: 12) and Evers et al. (2011) the investment proposals in land deals for agribusiness often come along with development promises. From schools to new wells, roads and clinics land deals often assume the resemblance of international aid programs. As Burnod at al. observed "[f]rom the mayor's point of view, welcoming an agribusiness project is similar to welcoming an international aid project. It is means to compensate for the deficiencies of the welfare state" (Burnod et al. 2011: 11).

We were told that the project was halted following claims by some of the members of the community supported by the organisations *Lamina* and *FIANTSO*, whose contribution is going to be discussed in the next section. The population complained that the project had not been clearly explained to the community, and that the process lacked transparency. Thus, the Ivoamba case bears a resemblance with the other cases presented above on the issue of transparency.

The politician did not share the claims made by some of the locals, however he declared himself willing to respect them. On the issue of land property and local development his views were summarised as follows:

'when the land is not used then it belongs to the state. The Chinese investors could improve the value of the land through usage.'

These two claims made by the politician are representatives of two concepts worth unpacking. The former idea illustrates the common belief, once law, that the state owns all untitled land (Gingembre 2015 ; Evers 2013) that appears not to be in use. This conception stemmed from the old colonial Torrens system which was in force in Madagascar until the land reform of 2005 (Teyssier CIRAD 2010). Whereas the latter idea is embedded in the myth of vast amounts of 'public, empty idle land' available for development of agribusiness in Madagascar (Teyssier et al. 2010). This belief is not uncommon among those who support large scale and modernised intensive agricultural development. International bodies like the World Bank have supported the myth of extensive 'empty' surfaces available for agricultural development in influential assessments such as the one published in 2008 (White, et al., 2012). A typical understanding is that these idle lands should be 'improved' and 'modernised' to tackle food and fuel scarcity, especially in developing country (White 2012). This, as I argued in an earlier chapter, could be regarded as contemporary expression of the doctrine of *Terra Nullius*.

Hopes for development among the villagers.

Another local informant (who wished to remain anonymous) who runs his own small business in the village held that the community would benefit as a whole from the project. He believed someone was trying to manipulate the opinion of those members of the community who were opposing the project. He lamented that the area was utterly neglected. They lacked infrastructures and there were no jobs nor opportunities for the youth. The youth would not be forced to leave the village to find jobs if these were created locally, he told us. He expressed little trust in the state institutions. Nonetheless, he believed that the project could bring new resources and work.

Since some members of the community protested, and especially since the story was covered, even those who have already signed to sell their land were backtracking on their decision. They did not want to expose themselves.

Fig. 5 The fields around Ivoamba (Photo by the Author)

The local resistance.

We also conducted a group interview with five people who opposed the project, out of which four were women. We were informed that it was mainly the members of two households who refused to give up on the lands their livelihoods depended on. They managed some of the land that would be allocated to the project. After a meeting with the head of district and a topographer they decided to halt the project. However they claimed that the project was tentatively pushed forward a number of times. We were told that the civil society organisations *Lamina* and *FIANTSO* supported their claims, together with the head of the district. Some of them sought *Lamina*'s support as they had helped them applying for land certificates in the past. We gathered that Lamina functioned as a bridge between the community and state institutions.

When asked whether they suggested to the investors other lands for the project and what they thought of the potential opportunities for development they replied they did not suggest alternatives and explained:

> *"Once you let the Chinese in they could end up taking everything. Welcoming the project would mean giving up much more than what is originally agreed upon in the deal. Just as it happened elsewhere in the country".*

This assertion contains a recurring view of Chinese investors I often heard during my time in Madagascar. Often mentally associated with South Korea and the Daweoo case, China appears to have a bad reputation in the Region. Such reputation is also due to investors' alleged general neglect of protocols to ensure transparency in conducting land deals. If on the one hand the community's allegations is a generalisation, one should also consider the presence of cases in which companies (not Chinese exclusively) did not engage in any consultations with the local population before gaining control of new territories and setting up new projects (Evers et al. 2011). And yet, it is worth remembering that in the instances presented here, as it is often the case, investors act jointly with state -often regional- institutions (Evers et al. 2011).

Simultaneously, the concerns expressed by the interviewees are all but unreasonable. In fact, in some regions of Madagascar "rights related to land or natural resources depend on the investment that has been carried out on it". This practically translates into permanent rights being secured through investment on the land (Lavigne et al. in Burnod 2011: 12).

In addition, just as in Ankaramena, people suspected that the agribusiness would only be a cover business for extractive operations in the area. They feared their lands would be taken away and their livelihoods disrupted just like it happened in other cases across the country. The politician we interviewed did not share such concerns. Furthermore, we were told that while the mayor had given up on the project, some figures in the local administration still intended to pursue it.

6 The role of Civil Society Organisations

> *"[in LLADs] the arena of negotiation and the nature of the debate can quickly become inaccessible or too complex for local rights' holders, and their defence often depends upon the support of third party organisations or political networks."*
>
> *(Evers, et al., 2011)*

In the previous chapter, different types of CSOs' support emerged. This chapter will develop on the way *FIANTSO*, *Justice et Paix-Lamina* and *VOIALA* can support local resistance and enable capacity building. After introducing these two CSOs in more detail I will move onto a discussion of the findings. Lastly, I will discuss how *VOIALA* could complete the contribution of *Justice et Paix -Lamina* and *FIANTSO*.

6.1 *FIANTSO*

FIANTSO works at the grass-roots level promoting democracy and good governance practices to strengthen inclusive local development processes. It is a member organisation of the International Land Coalition Network. Sahondra and I were granted an interview in its headquarters in Fianarantsoa, the regional capital. At the time of the interview they were in the process of organising a platform for a public debate on land tenure rights. They were trying to get the state institutions involved too. They clarified with us quite early in the conversation that they did not receive any funding from the state. Between 2010 and 2014 they engaged in training and public engagement programs with the communities. They continue to this day with their mission to function as a bridge between state institutions and communities. One of their main objectives is to facilitate the debate and dialogue on land rights. When they encounter new cases of land-grabbing they also try to find out who is the investor and what exactly they plan on doing.

FIANTSO also seeks media's support to give visibility to the different cases of land-grabbing across the country. In addition, they create resources on the topic and they share their experience in Madagascar with the International Land Coalition Network. In so doing they share information on how the phenomenon occurs in Madagascar, while simultaneously learning and taking inspiration from what has been done in other countries, especially in the African continent. The work of the organisation is funded by ECO (Irish Protestants); the EU; the International Land Coalition; and the UN project.

During our interview, the representatives of *FIANTSO* could not stress enough how the issue of LLADs in Madagascar is extremely multifaceted and how it involves different levels of governance. They reported that one of the central issues in the country appear to be how the 2005 policy on land certification and titles is actually implemented. Simultaneously they pointed out to us how land-grabbing is a structural issue. In fact, in many cases is the state itself that authorises foreign companies to install themselves on community land, overriding local customary arrangements for land property, and effectively violating their rights. This results in locals' exclusion from property. We talk in this case of a specific form of land-grabbing, where being the state the responsible of the land expropriation the expropriation seems to qualify as "legal land-grabbing". Underlying this is the idea that the state has the authority to override the locals' land rights for the greater good of collective utility of the project. On the state's side the rationale in supporting large land acquisition is the '*mise en place de l'Economie Speciale'* (implementing 'special economy'), especially of large scale investments in agriculture, as supported by the World Bank. Further, *FIANTSO* pointed out how the Malagasy traditional understanding of property in Malagasy culture is not reflected by the laws. A conflict arises when customary collective property rights need to be translated in individual rights, or when oral agreements among users are the only source of property claims and history of usage. *FIANTSO* also pointed to the intersectionality of land rights and gender. The vulnerability of women caused by barriers in the obtainment of land ownership and inheritance is a central issue in rural Madagascar. *FIANTSO* believed that by securing women's land rights the state could go a long way in the improving issues concerning land tenure. This effort should go along with acknowledging and working with local structures of governance, and produce legislation which incorporates local values attached to land. That is regulations which are culturally compatible with the context they are to be applied in. The same goes with regulations dealing with zebu herding and the management of the grazing fields: in order to be effective rules regulating use and access to pastoral lands should reflect and work along the local customary law and the

cultural values attached to the zebu. During our interview the importance of creating internationally coordinated mechanism of control over corporative behaviour was also mentioned.

6.2 *Justice et Paix – Lamina*

We also interviewed the project coordinator of the Lamina project. The project is run by the Catholic Diocese of Fianarantsoa and by the Catholic organization *Justice et Paix*. CRS (Catholic Relief Services providing technical and financial support) and the episcopal commission of *Justice et Paix* established the project due to the growing issue of litigations around land. The project was set up to address the land grabbing cases happening in the region by offering support to the affected communities. It was established in 2013 and included two phases. The first phase spanning between the years 2013 and 2015. The second phase between 2016 and 2018. There are five municipalities supporting the project. The project collaborates with: *service du foncier* (land tenure service); *service du domaine* (cadastral service); *service topographique* (topographic services); local authorities and civil societies.

During the interview two main types of land tenure conflict emerged: the first one concerning small investors and controversies occurring among relatives. *Lamina* emphasised, like *FIANTSO*, the importance of securing women land property rights. The second type involves bigger companies, especially foreign investors, in partnership with the state institutions (regions; municipalities).

Lamina focuses on raising awareness on the existent rights. The objective is the protection of farmer's lands. There is a vast number of people, especially among indigenous communities, who live and work on the land who have not enough knowledge of land rights and regulations. Simultaneously, a growing interests in resource extraction across the island is exacerbating the issue of community land rights, while adding a new global dimension to an already problematic land tenure reform. Furthermore, corruption, lack of transparency and the dire economic situation of Madagascar all have a negative impact on attempts to secure land rights. Lamina aims to spread information on land tenure rights and duties among rural communities. In such effort, the project also encourages the population to register their land ownership and obtain land certificates and titles. According to what reported by Lamina, around 15% of Malagasy

lands are protected with titles and certificates. On the remaining 85% people hold no property rights before positive law. Lamina stressed how land has a sacred value to the Malagasy.

Lamina's action also includes education on land rights in schools. In fact, they believe education of the future generations is pivotal in order to create a shift in mentality which would encourage people to register their lands. The project has no direct relations with the state and does not receive any funding from it. Rather, *Lamina* holds responsibility towards the populations, towards the communities. They organise training for mayors; people working in the land offices; traditional institutions; the population; and especially women, who often do not know their rights or are excluded from land property. In addition, the project also serves an advisory function through a centre. The centre offers guidance to communities experiencing controversies over land. *Lamina* also collects relevant information regarding controversies over land. The objective is to create a database on the litigations involving land issues occurring in the region.

Lamina facilitates communication between land offices and communities as well. They supported the distribution of about 1200 land titles and 200 certificates. They assisted communities in gathering evidence to apply for the certificates through photos, and topographic material. In fact, it is up to the community to show evidence of delimitation of territories and characteristics of their usage. *Lamina* also provides support by providing tools such as batteries for solar panels and ensured access to computers for several communities. And as the cases discussed above have shown, they do lobbying among decision makers who are responsible for concessions to foreign investors.

6.3 Supporting resistance

Both *FIANTSO* and *Justice et paix -Lamina* backed up the communities in peacefully demonstrating against the *Mada Ranch* project. In the case of Ivoamba the members of the local resistance to the project contacted *Lamina* to support them. A connection and a relationship of trust was already in place since *Lamina* had helped them in the past to obtain their land certificates.

In Ivoamba and Ankaramena *FIANTSO* participated in the public debate with the community and local politicians during the demonstrations. Having their claims heard and supported, and

their opinions valued by these two organisations boosted locals' will and determination in getting their demands across.

6.4 The importance of media coverage

One of the first actions undertaken by the communities of Andonaka and Ivoamba was to make sure what was happening in the villages would be covered in the regional news. The nuns of Andonaka were interviewed on the radio, journalists visited the site and talked to the locals. *Lamina* was set up by *Justice et Paix,* which also happen to run the newspaper and radio station *Amis de la Croix* which covered the events in their media. Evers et al. have pointed to the importance of media coverage (Evers et al. 2011), while Burnod et al. have presented information as a strategic resource. They suggested:

> *"It is essential to enhance the level of information made available to all stakeholders, from the investors (sometimes lost in the profusion of advice received from brokers), to the affected local populations who are often the last (and the least) informed. In a context of competing/conflicting interests and struggles for power amongst state representatives, local leaders and international investors, information is a strategic resource. One of the roles of civil society, including NGOs, experts, observers, researchers and the media, is to diffuse information on land-related investments."*
> (2013: 374)

Spreading information about LLADs serves multiple purposes. First, it connects the experiences of different communities on both the regional and the national level. This has the potential to lay the foundations for possible collaborations and mutual learning among the communities. Second, it sheds light on the incidence of LLADs in the region and how these tend to unfold. Third, spreading information about the deals can make both the investors and the deal brokers (it being the mayor or other local politicians) more accountable for their actions, especially when the deals are made in remote villages whose stories do not easily make it to the regional or national news.

6.5 The challenges of consultation

Lack of funding on the regional level makes it extremely hard to engage in consultation, especially in remote areas of difficult access where it becomes challenging to visit more than once. Similarly, the costs of mapping land property and use are often impossible to sustain for

local and regional state institutions. Hence, this results in the communities' heavier reliance on the support of CSOs like *FIANTSO* and *Lamina* in gaining a platform where their voices can be heard and where they can obtain the necessary tools to support their claims. Evers et al. have observed that

> *"[w]eak publicly expressed opposition by villagers to projects or land acquisitions are primarily due to a dearth of information. Consultation of local people is only compulsory within the framework of the environmental impact assessment. … locals are neither properly represented nor actually informed about planned investments, and their opposition or suggestions for amendments do not force the investor to withdraw or to substantially modify a project."*
>
> (Evers, et al., 2011: 126)

As the cases of Andonaka and Ivoamba have shown, the role of the *Lamina* project was crucial in getting the communities' claims across and have a real impact on the decision-making process. By mediating between the different stakeholders, engaging in training and campaigning, facilitating topographic and legal support *Lamina* had a central role in providing the tools needed to halt the project in Ivoamba and Andonaka. Furthermore, by being given a platform where their voices would be heard and respected the communities strengthened local initiative and ownership, and had confidence boosted. Such conditions have the potential to pave the way for a more active participation in the future and for more locally driven and meaningful developmental objectives.

6.6 Local power struggles can hamper locals' reactions to LLADs

Often unwillingly, LLADs can trigger latent power struggles among different groups within a community. For instance, it is often the mayor who act as the main broker in LLADs, as in the three cases presented here (Burnod et al. 2011; Burnod et al. 2013). And yet, Burnod et al. have observed that in this factor does not necessarily translate into stronger participation of the local population or better communication between the developers and the community (2011). Rather, this fact helps to understand the "discrepancy between the potential risks associated to large-scale land operations and the weak reactions to them" (Burnod et al. 2011: 13-14). In

fact, if on the one hand private investment projects tend to strengthen local governments' leverage, they do not necessarily increase participation and bargaining power homogeneously across the different local groups. In this context, CSOs can engage in and facilitate a more inclusive multi-stakeholders evaluation of risks and benefits sharing, which would help clarify the projects' repercussions on the social fabric and the local economy to every actor involved.

Fig. 6 One of *VOIALA*'s nurseries (Photo by the Author)

6.7 *VOIALA*

Since 2009 *VOIALA* has been engaged in reforestation, gardening projects, agronomy training and environmental education with communities and schools in Haute Matsiatra. The name *VOIALA* comes from the acronym for *Vondron' Olona Ifotany*, the Malagasy translation of *communauté de base* or COBA, that is the community institution created by the GELOSE legislation as discussed in chapter 3. *VOIALA* supports VOIs and the representatives of the VOI are in turn members of *VOIALA* themselves.

The main objectives of the association are helping out rural communities in the application process to register as VOI, and provide the communities with tools, seeds and seedlings. They also offer to introduce new practices and improve local ones where needed. However, its action

is manifold: it includes agroforestry, reforestation and environmental education. Their objective is to convey the importance of the environment and its conservation. The project also aims to contributing to the eradication of poverty, so to enable communities to obtain the necessary resources to look after their own environment. Lastly, *VOIALA* resolves to promote and facilitate applied research that pursues the betterment of the available tools for the locally embedded development of the community and the preservation of nature. It is determined to promote a society where people and the natural environment coexist in harmony, and where fundamental human rights and cultural values are respected.

As an active member of Slow Food International[15] *VOIALA* is committed to spread Slow Food philosophy. Slow Food advocates for healthy, flavoursome and good quality food; food production that is environmentally sustainable; and accessibility to food based on fair prices for the consumers and fair profits for the producers. In particular, *VOIALA* has been involved in the Slow Food project 'Ten thousand Gardens in Africa'[16]. This project aims to spread good food production and consumption practices. It also provides a platform for the training and engagement of leaders believing in the value of land and local traditional livelihoods.

VOIALA has always encouraged the communities it works with in establishing local organisations (LO) , often in the form of COBA composed of the members of the community themselves. Noticeably, none of the member communities of *VOIALA* has so far had any land acquisition deals-related issues.

[15] https://www.slowfood.com [Accessed 11/05/18]
[16] From the Slow Food website "Creating 10,000 good, clean and fair food gardens in African schools and communities means not only raising awareness among young generations about the importance of food biodiversity and access to healthy, fresh food, but also training a network of leaders aware of the value of their land and their culture who can serve as protagonists for change and the continent's future." https://www.fondazioneslowfood.com/en/what-we-do/10-000-gardens-in-africa-2/ [Accessed 11/05/18]

Map 2. VOIALA's Sites of Action. From: Andriamalala, Heritiana *Politique Environnmentale de Madagascar: entre conflits d'intérêts et confusions de rôles*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Toliara 2017

6.8 The community-based organisation of Ambatolahy

I will now introduce the case of Ambatolahy to provide an example of *VOIALA*'s contribution to communities' empowerment. Such empowerment, as this case shows, is achieved through training; support in setting up a local organisation; and support in establishing projects that aim to the realisation of food sovereignty. During one of my visits to the villages working with *VOIALA* I had the chance to interview Daniel Ratalata, the president of the community-based LO of Ambatolahy, *Asa fa tsy kabary*. Ambatolahy is a small hamlet surrounded by hills and rice paddies just off the main state road, the N7. It is home to about 120 villagers. The LO was created with *VOIALA*'s support and it included 15 families actively involved in the projects. The LO is not currently a COBA. Thanks to funding they could accessed since acquiring their status as association, the community had been engaging in permaculture; improved rice

cultivation; reforestation and poultry farming. Daniel emphasised how the funding that the community had been receiving through the LO had brought several benefits and improvements. For instance, thanks to the availability of funding they could now afford veterinary cures for the animals. Limiting the losses had meant having extra poultry and eggs which could be sold or exchanged with the nearby villages, thus producing income for the community. In addition, they believed that the introduction of new techniques learnt during the training offered by *VOIALA* helped them obtain increased rice yield. We were also told how the introduction of permaculture generally improved their seasonal harvests in the allotments, and the quality of the soil in the fields.

The organisation also considered the reforestation project to be of central importance. Daniel lamented how the local forest cover had dwindled over time due to prolonged community's use of the local wood resources for firewood and charcoal production. The LO is committed to continue to plant trees to offset their utilisation, whilst gradually restoring part of the local woods. Furthermore, as part of their commitment to reduce their environmental impact they decided to participate in a project for the introduction of a production system of biogas from organic waste, funded by Chinese investors. This shows a potentially virtuous example of how project supported by foreign investment may constitute an important resource for local communities. As long as its planning and implementation are agreed with the community, as Daniel remarked.

So far, Ambatolahy had not experienced attempts of encroachment on their land. Yet, the community was planning on applying for land certificates to secure their land use in the long term. Nonetheless, as we were told *"we have always only had oral agreements with each other. The land was given by our ancestors, that is how it works here"*. Furthermore, Daniel believed that the presence of an association charter which regulated community land – created with the help of *VOIALA* – effectively protected the members of the community from expropriation and prevented local conflicts.

The president reported that overall the community was satisfied with the results they had attained so far *"together we can achieve better results. As individual families we would not be able to accomplish the same",* he affirmed. In fact, there was the intention within the community to increase the land managed by the LO. One of their hopes for the future was to achieve the skills in accountancy and management which they were currently lacking, and had

to rely on *VOIALA* for. *VOIALA* expressed the intention to provide such training, and regretted that the current available funds were not enough for them to offer such service.

6.9 *VOIALA*'s unique contribution in supporting local and indigenous communities

As the case of Ambatolahy has showed, by observing and shadowing *VOIALA* during their visits to the communities, I saw emerging other ways in which CSOs can help communities to create local resistance to LLADs and protect their land rights.

Firstly, the community becomes a juridical person which can apply for and have available international funding. In fact, rural communities often lack the network and the technical or linguistic means to reach out to donors. Many among the villagers are illiterate and or lack the knowledge needed to run an association. However, organisations like *VOIALA* can bridge LOs and international donors; they can create opportunities for local capacity building by organising training among the villagers. They can help out with accountancy and provide support to make sure LOs comply with the regulations in place. More specifically, within the legal framework of the Management Transfer (TDG) *VOIALA* can help COBAs meet the requirements expected by the state institutions. Earlier in this thesis it was pointed out how COBAs often lack the skillset to meet the problematic expectation to behave like NGOs that state institutions place on them.

Furthermore, due to the need for spending traceability donors generally seem more likely to financially support an association rather than an individual or a family. Secondly, members who have customary rights on idle land can decide to entrust such fields to the association to develop projects for the benefit of the community as a whole. People tend to be more inclined do so with an established LO they might even be part of, or that know they can rely on. Thirdly, the dissemination of information and training within the community becomes more easily achieved. Especially with regard to land tenure regulations and application for titles and certificates, as the LO can help with planning and coordinating meetings.

From *VOIALA*'s experience the presence of a LO that brings together the community as a whole – and which has the advantage of being an institution legally recognised by the state – tends to strengthen local resistance by fuelling social movements. White et al. have pointed out, "[in all

regions of the world it is at the local level that organised social movements are relatively thin and weak " when it comes to agrarian struggles against corporate land investment (White 2012: 637). This point is particularly relevant in order to lay the foundations for food sovereignty, as this requires the presence of an organised and coordinated action. This is also done by engaging in environmental education and encouraging and facilitating the creation of community gardens based on a synergy between local values attached to land and the philosophy of Slow Food. Hence, *VOIALA* contributes to local resistance by providing the tools for the establishment and maintenance of the gardens and creating a platform for the appreciation and the production of local food. The food produced by the communities usually covers the local requirements, but surplus is often available. This gets sold at local markets thus creating profit that gets reinvested in fulfilling the needs of the community.

6.10 Concluding remarks

This chapter discussed the ways in which CSOs can support communities facing LLADs. It showed how CSOs can contribute to the improvement of the populace's general understanding and knowledge of their opportunities and responsibilities. This is achieved by making information on laws, rights and responsibilities more easily available and accessible to the communities. Simultaneously, CSOs create opportunities for community capacity building. As a result, opportunities for engagement and democratic participation are likely to increase and communities' bargaining power can be enhanced. CSOs bring attention on existing cases of LLADs by liaising communities and media, both on a regional and a national level. In so doing they spread information on ongoing LLADs, thus giving an idea of the scale of the issue, whilst connecting the struggles of different communities across the country. In addition, CSOs could orchestrate a shared effort with the state institutions and the communities in creating a platform for the appreciation and the understanding of local and traditional livelihood strategies, and the cultural meanings of land. Such effort would hopefully lay the foundations for the creation of truly inclusive and culturally appropriate systems for land tenure where the *lex fori* accommodate and respect the *lex loci*.

Earlier in this thesis it was mentioned how transferring local management to a newly created institution like the COBA could result in the local educated elite taking control over local resources to the detriment of the less educated. While this is a risk, cases where higher education is effectively put in service of the community should also be appreciated, *VOIALA* being an

example of this. In fact, the roles of higher responsibility within the organisation, namely the president and vice-president have typically been taken on by people educated at a master's or a doctoral level. Nonetheless, from my observations I could gather that what appear to be the main drive among the members of *VOIALA* was a genuine interest in the communities' welfare rather than careerism or self-interest.

Lastly, *VOIALA*'s contribution could integrate the efforts of *FIANTSO* and *Lamina* by supporting communities in planting local seeds of resistance: a structure for democratic participation and coordinated action in the form of local organisations, and the creation of community gardens for the achievement of food sovereignty.

7 Conclusion

This thesis was an initial attempt to investigate local CSOs' unique contributions to communities' resistance to, and mobilisation against LLADs. The cases presented here showed how local CSOs can provide determining support where land deals threaten communities' ownership of and access to land, and exclude communities from decision making processes. As the examples of *Lamina* and *FIANTSO* have showed, CSOs can facilitate topographic and legal support, training and media coverage. They can produce research and information on LLADs which is both relevant and accessible to the communities. They can mediate the communities' relations with investors and state institutions. Thanks to their expertise and connection with the communities they work with, CSOs can place themselves in a convenient position of mediators between the realms of the *lex fori* and the *lex loci.* They can provide communities with the capacity-building necessary to engage with the *lex fori* sphere. They can improve communication among stakeholders. In addition, as the case of the Ambatolahy has illustrated, organisations like *VOIALA* can assist communities in setting up local associations for community-based land management. Further, by encouraging the establishment of community gardens they can support communities wishing to preserve their local traditional livelihood strategies.

What appeared clear in the cases presented here is that in order to protect indigenous and local communities' interests in LLADs stronger means of participation in the decision making processes behind LLADs are needed. Furthermore, regulations need to me made understandable and accessible to the communities and their diversity of literacy levels and expertise. Training on rights and duties need to be available to the communities and the officials dealing locally with land tenure issues. Simultaneously, a public debate on the complexity of the land tenure system in the country has to be encouraged: the different actors involved need to be aware of the unavoidable clash of differing world-views and values. These involve understanding and respecting local livelihood strategies and the non-monetary value given to land; addressing the incompatibility between common and private property systems; and reconciling attitudes of stewardship towards land versus property and exploitation- oriented ones. Lastly, the tension between perspectives that favour a commons rather than a commodity understanding of natural resources needs to be resolved. A food sovereignty perspective,

embodied in the establishment of community gardens, could have the potential to connect all these significant discourses in a meaningful and concrete way.

Community gardens would enable a higher degree of local autonomy by allowing the communities to produce on site much of what is needed to fulfil the needs of the local population. The creation of such local autonomy would enable modes of production that locals would have more control on, in contrast to market-driven capitalist modes. In such context, where consumers and producers are ultimately part of the same community, producers would likely be held more accountable. Any surplus could be either sold to or exchanged with neighbouring villages. Simultaneously, keeping food production on a local scale would constitute an opportunity to create employment locally. Further, community gardening creates an occasion for learning, sharing and passing on new and traditional knowledge. Lastly, food sovereignty allows for tailored agricultural development solutions which are embedded in local traditional food systems, hence culturally appropriate and fitting to the local environment. As Isakson observed among Guatemalan farmers, self-sufficient agricultural practices are seen by the locals "as an expression of cultural identity, as a medium for fortifying social bonds, as a form of food provisioning that offsets the vagaries and uncertainty of the market, and as a rejection of the complete commodification of food" (Isakson, 2009: 755). Food sovereignty with its emphasis on fostering sustainability and bio-cultural diversity of food production and consumption practices could prove crucial to the sustainment of a resilient food supply. In fact, the genetic variety associated with subsistence peasant agriculture is considered the cornerstone of the global food supply (Isakson, 2009). As Isakson has observed "[g]iven the importance of crop genetic diversity to global food security, it is a sad irony that the peasant farmer who sustain it are among the poorest and most marginalised populations in the world" (Isakson, 2009: 726).

7.1 Analytical contribution

This thesis contributed to a discourse on how CSO's can support resistance to LLADs and local communities' organisation and mobilisation work. This was achieved through participatory research methods and by linking the topic of the role of CSOs to the broader discourses of agrarian justice and indigenous struggles. Even though the focus was on the Haute Matsiatra region in Madagascar, the analysis was informed by literature that regards LLADs as a global

phenomenon sharing similar characteristics around the world. Further, the phenomenon of LLADs was understood as stemming directly from capitalist expansion and neoliberal policies enacted by international bodies such as the World Bank and the IMF.

7.2 Limitations of the Study and Further Research

This thesis is but an initial contribution into the role of local CSOs in Madagascar and the various forms that their work may take. Time restrictions and an initial unfamiliarity with the area of study both have limited the outcomes of the research. The analysis would have benefitted from more in-depth interviews which would have been possible only by paying multiple visits to the villages. *VOIALA*'s contribution in particular should be further researched as its approach could make a reproducible model.

Further, *FIANTSO* expressed the need for further insight on how the voices of the members of rural communities can be heard at the level of state institutions. At the same time, more research is needed to gain insight into the challenges faced by CSOs, such as discontinuity and limited availability of funding. Discontinuous availability of funds in particular, can severely hamper the work of small local CSOs. In fact, members of small organisations like *VOIALA* are constantly faced with the daunting prospect of an investor pulling out funding. This creates a difficult sense of insecurity to live with for both *VOIALA*'s members and employees.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

As UN Rapporteur Olivier de Schutter has remarked "the most pressing issue regarding investment in agriculture is not how much, but how: what we need is not to regulate land grabbing as if this were inevitable, but to put forward an alternative programme for agricultural investment." (in White et al. 2012: 235). The political project of food sovereignty has the potential to frame such alternative programme, and to bring the best interest of communities and the environment at the centre of a discourse on agricultural development.

I do not deny the potential of foreign investment in infrastructure and agricultural development in deprived and disenfranchised areas of Madagascar and Sub-Saharan Africa. Nor I wish to suggest that local communities should reject any form of capitalist forms of market engagement. Rather, I want to suggest that stronger participatory tools need to be in place to

secure local democratic processes and a greater degree of local autonomy in food production and land management. These should go hand in hand with the implementation of land reforms which benefit local smallholder and subsistence economies, rather than corporations. I would like to conclude once again with the words of the poet Wendell Berry, who has denounced: "[t]he 'free trade' which from the standpoint of the corporate economy brings 'unprecedented economic growth', from the standpoint of the land and its local populations, and ultimately from the standpoint of the cities, is destruction and slavery. Without prosperous local economies, the people have no power and the land no voice" (Berry, 2001).

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